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RELIGION, SOCIETY AND GODLY WOMEN

The Nature of Female Piety in a Late Medieval Urban Community

Stephanie J. Adams

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements of the degree of PhD in the Faculty of Arts, Department of English in January 2001.

Word count: 80, 230

This is a study of the pious and devotional lives of laywomen in a late medieval urban community (a subject which has not yet been probed in any depth). It focuses on such issues as whether and in what ways female pious expression and activity can be seen as a response to or shaped by the social, legal and political constraints upon women living in a patriarchal society. It examines women's piety as it was related to and affected by marital status, progression through the life cycle, and the nature of female networking. It also looks at such aspects of medieval piety as charitable giving and devotion to the cults of saints within Bristol, comparing and contrasting the nature of pious bequests by men and women. The relationship of the community with religious houses and urban attitudes towards the female religious vocation are also studied.

Throughout, I have attempted to keep in mind the possible effects of social and economic change upon such issues. I have tried to discover whether such a phenomenon as a distinct urban female piety can be detected, and whether there existed characteristics peculiar or unique to the piety of the women of the Bristol élite, characteristics which can be compared and contrasted with those detected in sudies of female piety in other urban communities. The thesis is mainly concerned with the experiences of mercantile women, although attention has been paid to the few groups of gentry women known to have had links with some of Bristol's religious institutions in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Bristol. The work is original except where indicated by special reference in the text and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other degree. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University of Bristol. The dissertation has not been presented to any other University for examination either in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Stephanie S. Adams

1st January 2001

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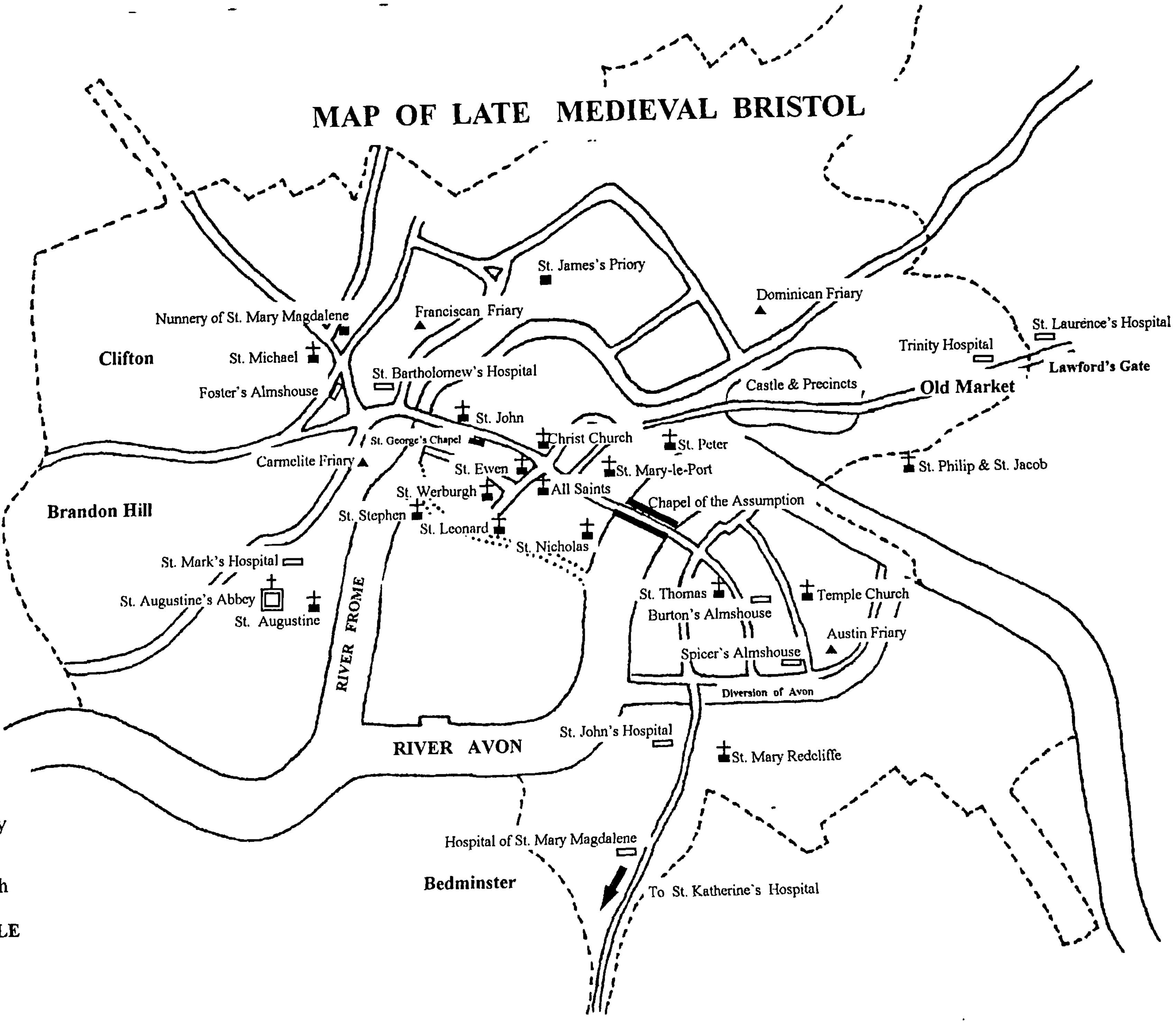
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BRO	Bristol Record Office
BRS	Bristol Record Society
CPR	*Calendar of Patent Rolls*
DNHASP	Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society Proceedings
EETS	Early English Text Society
EHR	English Historical Review
HWRO	Hereford and Worcester Record Office
JEH	Journal of Ecclesiastical History
PCAC	Proceedings of the Clifton Antiquarian Club
PRO	Public Record Office, London
PSANHS	Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society
SRS	Somerset Record Society
TBGAS	Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaelogical Society
VCH	Victoria History of the Counties of England
WAM	Wiltshire Archaelogical Magazine
WHS	Worcestershire Historical Society
WRO	Wiltshire Record Office
WRS	Wiltshire Record Society

MAP OF LATE MEDIEVAL BRISTOL



Key

- - -City Boundary in 1373

Parish Church

NOT TO SCALE

> And, whil sche was thus stille in Bristowe aftyr þe byddyng of God, owr mercyful Lord Crist Ihesu visityd hys creatur wyth many holy meditacyons & many hy contemplacyonys & many swet comfortys. & þer was sche howselyd euery Sonday wyth plentyuows terys & boystows sobbyngys, wyth lowde cryingys and schille schrykyngys. & þerfor many man & many woman wondyrd up-on hir, skornyd hir & despised hir, bannyd hir & cursyd hir, seyde meche euyl of hir, slawndryd hir, & born hyr on hande þat sche xulde a seyd thyng whech þat sche seyd neuyr.[1]

The above passage describes the hostile reactions experienced by Margery Kempe from the laity of medieval Bristol to her very public display of pious emotion when she stayed there in 1417 waiting for a boat to take her to St. James de Compostella in Spain. A few days later, when she was about to board a ship bound for her destination, she faced further hostility in the form of a 'riche man of Bristowe whech wolde nót late þe seyd creatur seylen in þat schip, for he held hir no good woman'. Not willing to suffer this affront in silence, Margery retorted to him, '"Syr, yf ȝe put me owt of þe schip, my Lord Ihesu xal put ȝow out of Heuyn, for I telle ȝow, ser, owr Lord Ihesu hath no deynte of a ryche man les þan he will be a good man & a meke man"'. She further said 'many scharp wordys on-to him wyth-owtyn any glosyng er flateryng.'[2] It cannot be claimed that the wives and widows of the wealthy Bristol élite practised Margery's particular brand of piety, which was characterized by emotional outbursts and extraordinary bouts of weeping, and which frequently drew upon her the disapproval of various secular and religious authorities, who feared that she was acting inappropriately for someone of her sex and class. However, these two incidents are useful, for they introduce or hint at themes pertinent to this study, that is, the nature of female pious activity and thought within the late-medieval urban community—in particular, the city of Bristol—and the way in which patriarchal society may have correspondingly shaped it.

It was, of course, seen as entirely appropriate for a woman to spend her time in 'busy prayer & seruice of God in werkes of deuocioun & gladliche and

moche be at chirche' and, as the Knight of La-Tour Landry advised his daughters 'to putte youre diligence with humble and deuote hert to serve God, and holde the companie of good folke of good leuing and of charitable werkes, and truste hem that counsaile you to uertu and worship.'[3] Pious aristocratic ladies such as Cecily of York and Margaret Beaufort can be cited as well-known examples of women admired for their religious discipline later in life and for the running and maintenance of their household, managed around a strict regime of fasting and prayer.[4] To a certain extent, of course, female piety was 'socially produced', appearing to conform to the standards and ideals set out in late-medieval courtesy texts and conduct manuals and to be shaped by the hierarchical and male-dominated conventions of the late medieval world.[5] However, this does not mean that it lacked personal relevance and was essentially no more than an important component of family and community life which contributed to the upholding of medieval society. Furthermore, while there were common elements in male and female piety, in a world where most women were expected or compelled to live their lives according to certain prescribed roles set down by patriarchal authorities, both secular and religious, pious activity was one of the few outlets available to them for some freedom of manoeuvre, means of self-expression, or even self-determination. This is not to imply that certain forms of female piety necessarily encouraged overtly subversive, rebellious or unorthodox thought or behaviour, but that certain aspects of female pious expression and activity may sometimes be seen either as a response to (or a reaction against) the legal, political, social and economic constraints faced by women in the world of late medieval Christendom, and to the ideological constructs formed about them by patriarchal authorities. I would like to look at how far and in what ways this was the case. Although the study of medieval women has attracted much interest in the last decade or so, as shown by the increasing amount of published materials on the subject, and although historians have looked at aspects of women's lives in relation to

the structures and institutions of medieval society, they have tended to look at these issues more from an economic or legal perspective. While this has produced much of interest about the lives of medieval women, it has given us little information about their own view of their experiences and position in society.[6] By concentrating on aspects of religious behaviour, it can be argued that it is possible to obtain more insight into the thought processes of medieval women, admittedly an area always difficult to penetrate.

Furthermore, the piety and devotional lives of urban women in the late medieval period have not attracted the same amount of attention as that of noble and gentry women, although it has not been a totally neglected subject. General accounts of the lives and experiences of the female sex in the medieval period have included chapters on urban women, where small sections have been devoted to their pious habits and activities.[7] As regards England, studies of urban women have been undertaken for individual cities, in particular York. Jeremy Goldberg has researched the lives of women in this provincial capital and the surrounding countryside, mostly from the social and economic angle, while Patricia Cullum, also using York evidence, has touched upon aspects of female pious activity by looking at charitable giving in an urban setting.[8] Besides York, Caroline Barron and others have looked at aspects of women's lives in London for the same period, including pious practices and devotional activity.[9] Studies of late medieval piety within the English urban community have not focused upon specifically female practices or activities, although Norman Tanner, in his study of Norwich, has made the interesting observation that this may have been the only English city to have had 'sorores castitati dedicate', women living in small groups, dedicated to lives of chastity.[10] However, the piety of urban women is not a subject that has been studied in depth, which is surprising, perhaps, in light of the fact that Margery Kempe, the English woman who left behind the most detailed record of her pious practices and spiritual experiences, came from a reasonably affluent urban

background. Thus there is considerable scope for undertaking a study focused on these issues.

Somerset and Gloucestershire, in which two counties Bristol lay, in contrast to regions like London, Yorkshire and East Anglia, has been relatively neglected as an area for research into women's piety, and, indeed, for the lives of medieval women in general, although recent research has been done on one pious gentlewoman of note native to the area: Eleanor Hull, née Malet, who translated religious works into English from French, was born at Enmore in Somerset, and ended her life in the Benedictine priory at Cannington in the same county.[11] Bristol itself, although one of the largest and most important cities in England at this time, has never been used as a base for a study of late-medieval women. However, the city's surviving evidence for the medieval period offers considerable scope for investigation and has thrown up fascinating details about the pious and devotional lives of certain individual women as well as general trends in female piety. The material also allows for contrasts and comparisons to be made with studies done on women in other urban centres in this period, as Bristol had its own particular characteristics which set it apart from other cities. Useful research on the religious lives of Bristol's inhabitants in the fifteenth century has been carried out recently by Clive Burgess, although he has not been specifically concerned with female piety.[12] I therefore hope to build on the work done on lay piety in Bristol, as well as the research carried out both on women's piety in general, and the social and economic aspects of women's lives in other urban centres, to build up a picture of the nature of laywomen's piety within the city in the medieval period. For the most part, this study is concerned with women from mercantile backgrounds, as Bristol did not experience a strong noble or gentry presence in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, but I have included discussion of a small number of women of gentry origin who appear to have had strong links with some of the city's religious institutions in the

later fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

The nature of the evidence used for a study of this sort makes it difficult to uncover precise details about the daily religious routine or devotional practices of either men or women, although this can sometimes be deduced. The importance of the position, pious role and specific religious duties of women within the family and household, and towards society in general, was stressed by didactic material like *Dives et Pauper* and the *Book of the Knight of La-Tour Landry*, but it is difficult to know how far this actually typified female religious practices. Further, because of the lack of biographical or autobiographical material, and because single and married women feature little in records, usually being subsumed under the authority of father or husband, it is rarely, if at all, possible to follow the life of any individual woman from the cradle to the grave. However, it is sometimes possible to see how marital status such as spinsterhood, marriage and widowhood may have affected female pious expression, or how pious inclinations may have differed or altered according to age, and I intend to look at the question of female piety as it was related to and affected by marital status and the life cycle, a question of particular interest to this study because of its connection to the unique patterns of will-making to be found within the urban community in this period. Yet it is also clear, from a study of the Bristol testamentary evidence, that while the marital relationship and immediate family were of considerable importance to women, they also formed strong relationships and friendships not only with female relatives, but with women outside of their immediate family circle, usually lay but sometimes religious, and it is evident that such relationships between women strongly informed or reinforced patterns of female piety. Thus the nature of female networking in Bristol, a topic which includes discussion of wealthy women as benefactresses to the parish church, has been examined in some detail.

While laywomen's piety is discussed as it may have influenced and was

influenced by family and friends, certain aspects of female pious behaviour relating to the wider community, both secular and religious, have also been looked at. Charitable giving, perhaps most obviously associated with women because of the expectation that they would be household providers spending much of their time in caring for family, poor neighbours and the sick, has been studied in one chapter. This it may be noted is one of the few areas where the lives and experiences of poor as well as wealthy women can be focused upon to some extent. Another chapter looks at the relationship of lay men and women with members of the religious orders and the secular clergy, as there is evidence to suggest that the relationship between pious urban women and members of the parish clergy could assume considerable importance in the former's widowhood. Devotion to the saints, as elsewhere, appears to have played an important part in the religious life of Bristol's lay inhabitants throughout the period; so a chapter examining the nature of female veneration of the saints has been included, comparing and contrasting it with that of their male counterparts, and covering such issues as corporate saintly devotion and the ways in which this may have affected the nature of female piety in a large urban community. Throughout, women's involvement in educational and literary projects as a part of, or related to, pious activity has been kept in mind, although the evidence for this, as regards Bristol, is not extensive.

Lay piety was, of course, susceptible to change and it is therefore intended to look at aspects of female piety not only as it may have been affected by devotional and liturgical trends and movements, but also as it may occasionally have been touched by social and economic changes and developments, for there is some evidence to suggest that changes in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century economic life, particularly in urban communities, may have altered not only the actual position of women, but also the attitudes of those in authority towards them and other disempowered or marginal groups. Economic and social

change could affect most obviously such aspects of lay piety as charitable giving, influencing the way in which women were viewed as deserving recipients of charitable bequests over the course of the fifteenth century, but it is also possible that it may have affected the attitudes of the urban community towards other groups of women, such as female religious. By examining all these issues in some depth, and, as far as possible, comparing the experiences of these women with those of women from the surrounding region and the smaller towns of medieval Somerset, as well as those who lived in large urban communities elsewhere, I hope to uncover how far the piety of laywomen within the large urban community had strong distinguishing features or characteristics, and whether indeed such a phenomenon as a distinct female, urban piety can be identified. I also intend to look at how far and in what ways Bristol may have differed from other large urban centres in this respect.

Given the nature of the subject under discussion, this study has been based less on a statistical or numerical analysis or approach—which can lead to conclusions that obscure or heap together women's experiences in an arbitrary fashion, or are more appropriate when studying women's history from an economic angle, or for questions relating to social issues such as marriage patterns—than on a detailed study of the activities and practices of individual women or groups of women. This approach is, I believe, the most useful when researching an area such as laywomen's piety, which attempts to penetrate thought and belief: besides, enough evidence survives to be able to build up a picture of the life of certain individuals. Thus for example, the piety of Alice Chester, wife of an eminent merchant of the mid-to-late fifteenth century, is examined in some depth in the chapters on both female networks and male religious orders, while a separate chapter has been devoted to a particularly prominent and devout Bristol widow, Maud Baker. However, the other approach has not been eschewed completely, as male and female

testamentary evidence from the Great Orphan Book of Wills and the Great Red Book has been used statistically from time to time for purposes of comparison and contrast, to analyse changes in particular devotional trends or religious preferences, and to try to fit the experiences and beliefs of individual women such as Maud Baker and Alice Chester into a wider context.

A Note on Sources

Although Bristol cannot boast any well-known women like Margery Kempe or Julian of Norwich, who left behind written evidence of their pious activity and belief, a variety of sources can be used to study the piety of Bristol's inhabitants in the late medieval period, including over 500 surviving wills, not as many as exist for other towns of a similar size, but not an insubstantial amount.[13] Over 60 per cent were registered in the Great Orphan Book of Wills, where the medieval sequence begins in 1379 and ends in 1509.[14] Most of the others were registered in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, the earliest dating from 1403, although about a quarter were registered in both courts. A much smaller number of wills was entered in the Great Red and Little Red Books of Bristol, while a few others can be found in episcopal registers or amongst collections of deeds and parish memoranda.

Despite criticism concerning their appropriateness for the purpose, wills remain one of the most useful pieces of evidence for studying medieval piety and extensive use has been made of them.[15] As we lack, for the most part, material of a biographical nature for medieval people, wills provide more personal insight into their lives than perhaps any other document, although it should, of course, be pointed out that they were made primarily by the more affluent members of society, who only made up a small proportion of the population. Thus it is lay people from these classes who figure predominantly in this study rather than a broad cross-section of society. Other caveats regarding the use of such documents should also be kept in mind. For

instance, not all wills are of use for uncovering pious intention; some are very short, making only minimal religious provision, although it is the rare will that does not mention it at all. It has also been suggested that the wills of urban testators are less revealing than the wills of those from the noble and gentry classes.[16] While there may be some truth in this, as the wills of wealthy urban testators overall (and particularly those dated before 1450) appear shorter than those of wealthy gentry testators, it may be noted that some rich and influential urban widows, such as Maud Baker, whose life and piety is discussed in the final chapter, left extremely lengthy wills, allowing us to gain insights not only into their pious and devotional lives, but also their family and social background. Furthermore, even though some wills might be relatively short, they sometimes contain much of interest as regards an individual's pious preferences, so that the length of a will is not always the best indicator of its usefulness. Neither is it necessarily true that wills merely reflect deathbed fears and preoccupations rather than the pious concerns of a lifetime. Certainly, it is true that they do not always mention pious bequests made to the church in the years before a testator's demise, but it seems unreasonable to suggest that pious testamentary bequests reveal little or nothing of an individual's lifetime concerns or commitments. Isabel Barstaple, for example, widow of a mayor of Bristol, in her 1412 will left many bequests and instructions relating to Holy Trinity Hospital, situated in Old Market Street, which had been founded by her husband John seventeen years before.[17] It is possible too, that the thought of approaching death was a time when an individual would feel compelled to give the strongest expression to lifelong religious thoughts and beliefs. In particular, widows, who made up the vast majority of female testators in this period, may have found the last will and testament to be the one document that allowed them some genuine freedom of expression, enabling them to dispose of goods to people and individuals more or less as they chose.

Naturally, a topic of this nature involves some study of relations between the sexes and a comparison of male and female religious preferences and activities. Thus an attempt has been made to compare male and female testamentary provision and wills made by husband and wife where both have survived, although in any such comparison it should be pointed out that the freedom of married men (who make up the largest percentage of male testators) to make pious provision for themselves may sometimes have been curtailed by the fact that they had to provide for widows and children, usually to the extent of a half or two thirds of their goods, the half or remaining third to be used for pious provision. Widows, not being obliged to do this, were perhaps able to give greater expression to their pious inclinations and preferences, thereby making an accurate comparison of religious intent difficult. However, it can also be pointed out that there are numerous examples of male testators who left property or goods to wives and children for their lifetimes, but who specified that on the death of their dependants, the bequests were to go to a religious order or charitable cause. Furthermore, testators do not appear to have stuck to hard and fast rules regarding disposal of goods, and a study of male wills entered in the Great Orphan and Great Red Books reveals that, while some made the specified division into halves or thirds, frequently the arrangements were more complicated, showing detailed provision for both dependants and religious or charitable causes. The wealthier the family, the more likely this was to be the case. It is possible that the wills of widows sometimes reflected the wishes of their deceased husbands as much as their own, which might explain the brevity of some male wills, but where the wills of husband and wife survive, it is evident that both were usually concerned to make separate pious provision for themselves, independently of each other.

There are particular problems with the Bristol testamentary evidence as it relates to women, although these are interesting in themselves. Less than a fifth of the 500 or so surviving Bristol wills were made by women, so the city

cannot boast such large numbers of female testators as regional centres like York or Norwich: indeed, the number of women making wills appears to have been lower in Bristol than for other major urban centres, although quite why this should have been the case is unclear.[18] A reasonable number of female wills survive for approximately the first fifty years of the period studied. From 1375-1399, female testators made up 9.4 per cent of all testators, while in the period 1400-1424, this figure increased to 14.7 per cent of the whole. However, the years 1425-1449 saw a dramatic fall in the number of female testators, with only two women leaving a will, comprising 3.2 per cent of testators, and there are no extant female wills for the 1440s. This period also saw a fall in the number of men making wills, but by no means as great as in the case of women. The next twenty-five years saw a slight rise in the number of female wills, as they made up 6.7 per cent of testators, and the last quarter of the fifteenth century saw a substantial increase in their number, most of it occurring in the last decade; women then made up 12.7 per cent of all testators, near the level that it had been at the beginning of the century.[19] It is difficult to account for these fluctuations and it does not seem likely that loss of testamentary evidence in the middle years of the fifteenth century can account for it. Furthermore, the phenomenon does not seem to have been peculiar to Bristol, as Jeremy Goldberg's study of York testators for approximately the same period shows similar tendencies, with the number of female testators declining as the fifteenth century progressed. Rochester too apparently experienced like trends.[20] However, there are some differences between the urban centres, as, in the first instance, the fall in female wills appears to have been more dramatic in Bristol than elsewhere; secondly, the York evidence does not show a similar rise in female testators towards the end of the century. Most of the explanations that have been put forward as reasons for the decline in female wills relate to the decline in married testators, but it seems unlikely that such a sudden drop in the number of women making

wills can be attributed totally to the fact that fewer married women were making them.[21] Nor does it throw any light on the falling number of male wills. It may be linked to or part of more regional trends, such as changes in conventions regarding will-making, or demographical factors, for these trends do show some similarities with patterns of will-making for Somerset as a whole in the same period.[22] The gap in female testamentary evidence, interesting in itself but difficult to explain, can sometimes make it more difficult to uncover and analyse trends and changes in pious behaviour or religious convention; at the least, it demands that they should be kept in mind when making such observations.

There is, however, other material available, which, although of a less personal nature, can be used to supplement the testamentary sources. Church books include churchwardens' accounts, parish memoranda and lists of benefactors, although considerably more survives for the second half of the fifteenth century than for the preceding period. The All Saints' church book contains the fullest set of churchwardens' accounts for Bristol in the late medieval period, covering most of the fifteenth century (1407-1483), as well as two inventories of church goods, one from the fourteenth century, and a longer one from the fifteenth. Most useful is its list of church benefactors, which describes their donations in some detail. The gifts of many of Bristol's wealthiest and most influential widows are recorded here, revealing much about pious and devotional tastes and inclinations. Although the list of 'good doers' includes people from as far back as the late thirteenth century, the vast majority can be identified as members of the late-fifteenth-century urban élite, not surprising, perhaps, in view of the fact that the book was compiled in about the year 1470.[23] The church book of St. Ewen's has four inventories of church goods, sometimes giving the names and further details of benefactors, and a set of churchwardens' accounts dating from 1454, while the church book of St. John's, dating from 1469, has no proper churchwardens' accounts, but

contains an inventory, copies of deeds, and other parish memoranda. There is less surviving evidence for other parishes, although an inventory book survives for St. Stephen's church, dating from 1494. The church book of St. Nicholas's, which dated from 1395 and contained an inventory, wills and other memoranda, was unfortunately destroyed in World War II, although a summary and extracts of its contents had been made by Cuthbert Atchley beforehand.[24]

In addition to the church books, a number of medieval deeds also survive for many of Bristol's parishes, with All Saints' and St. John's having especially large collections. These date from the thirteenth century and sometimes provide evidence of the pious acts and religious foundations of individuals. Bristol's medieval chronicles and corporation records, the most useful of which are the Great Red and the Little Red Books, span the period, and, as well as providing background material and biographical information on some of the families and individuals discussed in this study, sometimes give details of the religious provision and charitable foundations made by members of the urban élite, where instructions were left for these to be administered by the Commonalty of Bristol. Despite the difficulties with the existing materials (in particular, that there are chronological gaps with different survival rates for the various sources), enough remains, I believe, to build up a picture of pious trends and practices among élite women, and possible changes in them over time. Further discussion of the evidence, particularly the testamentary, can be found in the following chapter (which looks at Bristol as a social, economic and religious community) as it has some bearing on such issues as the status and position of women within urban society in the late medieval period.

NOTES

1. Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen (eds.), *The Book of Margery Kempe*, EETS OS 212 (1940), p. 107.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

3. Venetia Nelson (ed.), *A Myrour to Lewde Men and Wymmen: A Prose Version of the Speculum Vitae from B. L. MS Harley 45*, Middle English Texts Series (Heidelberg: Winter, 1981), p. 9; Thomas Wright (ed.), *The Book of the Knight of La-Tour Landry, Compiled for the Instruction of His Daughters*, EETS OS 33 (1868), p. 125. See also Priscilla Heath Barnum (ed.), *Dives et Pauper*, EETS OS 275 (1976), I (ii), 328, 339.

4. For a description of Cecily's daily pious activities and household routine see *A Collection of Ordinances and Regulations for the Government of the Royal Household Made in Divers Reigns From King Edward III to King William and Queen Mary* (London: Society of Antiquaries, 1790), pp. 37-9. See also C. A. J. Armstrong, 'The Piety of Cicely, Duchess of York: A Study in Late Mediaeval Culture', in Douglas Woodruff (ed.), *For Hilaire Belloc: Essays in Honor of his 71st Birthday* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1942), pp. 73-94. For Margaret Beaufort see the 'mornynge remembraunce had at the moneth mynde of the noble prynces Margarete countesse of Rychemonde and Derbye', in John E. B. Mayor (ed.), *The English Works of John Fisher*, EETS ES 27 (1876), pp. 289-310. Bishop Fisher compared Margaret to the biblical Martha, but aspects of Margaret's piety have recently been probed in more depth in Michael K. Jones and Malcolm G. Underwood, *The King's Mother* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). The piety of a local noblewoman, Margaret, Lady Hungerford, who appears to have engaged herself in pious activities and building work towards the end of her life, has also been researched and some attempt made to delve beneath the surface of her religious inclinations and devotional activities: see M. A. Hicks, 'The Piety of Margaret, Lady Hungerford (d. 1478)', *JEH*, 38 (1987), pp. 19-38.

5. The quoted phrase is from Patricia Crawford, *Women and Religion in England 1500-1720* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 74.

6. This subject area has, however, been touched upon by historians writing about various aspects of female piety and related topics in medieval Europe, although no study, as far as I know, pertains specifically to England. See, for example, Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society: the Two Worlds of Western Christendom 1000-1700* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1982), who discuss the way piety manifested itself in late medieval female saints. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1987), and Rudolph M. Bell, *Holy Annorexia* (London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), both look at the issue of women gaining some measure of control or autonomy in a patriarchal society by discussing food and its links to medieval female piety. See also the collections of essays in Daniel Bornstein and Roberto Rusconi (eds.), *Women and Religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996) and Lène Dresen-Coenders (ed.), *Saints and She-Devils: Images of Women in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (London: Rubicon, 1987), which concentrates on the experiences of women living in the Low Countries.

7. See, for example, Shulamith Shahar, *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages* (London and New York: Routledge, 1983), pp. 174-279, and for a chapter devoted specifically to women and religion in medieval towns see Erika Uitz, *The Legend of Good Women: The Liberation of Women in Medieval Cities* (Wakefield and London: Moyer Bell, 1994), pp. 153-76.

8. P. J. P. Goldberg, *Women, Work, and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy; Women and Work in York and Yorkshire c. 1300-1520* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); P. H. Cullum, 'And Hir Name was Charite: Charitable Giving by and for Women', in P. J. P. Goldberg (ed.), *Woman is a Worthy Wight: Women in English Society c. 1200-1500* (Stroud: Sutton, 1992), pp. 182-211.

9. Caroline Barron, 'The "Golden Age" of Women in Medieval London', *Reading Medieval Studies*, 15 (1989), pp. 35-58, discusses various legal and economic issues relating to women. For a study of individual London women see Caroline Barron and Anne F. Sutton (eds.), *Medieval London Widows, 1300-1500* (London and Rio Grande: Hambledon, 1994); and on urban women's participation in religious and parish guild activity see Caroline Barron, 'The Parish Fraternities of Medieval London', in C. M. Barron and C. Harper-Bill (eds.), *The Church in Pre-Reformation Society: Essays in Honour of F. R. H. Du Boulay* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1985), pp. 13-37.

10. Norman Tanner, *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich 1370-1532* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1984), pp. 64-6, 130-1. He has suggested that these may have resembled continental beguinages, although more recently Roberta Gilchrist and Marilyn Oliva, in their research on religious East Anglian women, have warned against making this comparison, claiming that as there is no concrete evidence to suggest that their life-style resembled that of the beguines, to do so may obscure 'their real vocation and true functions': see Roberta Gilchrist and Marilyn Oliva, *Religious Women in Medieval East Anglia: Studies in East Anglian History 1* (Centre of East Anglian Studies: University of East Anglia, 1993), pp. 19-20.

11. See Alexandra Barratt, 'Dame Eleanor Hull: A Fifteenth-Century Translator', in R. Ellis (ed.), *The Medieval Translator: The Theory and Practice of Translation in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1989), pp. 87-101. Further information on Eleanor can be found in Barratt's introduction to her edition of one of Eleanor's translations: see *A Commentary on the Penitential Psalms Translated by Dame Eleanor Hull*, EETS OS 307 (1995), pp. xxiii-xxxiii. On the Hull family see R. W. Dunning (ed.), *The Hylle Cartulary*, SRS 68 (1968).

12. Two of his articles deal rather negatively with the usefulness of testamentary evidence for the study of medieval lay piety: see '"By Quick and by Dead": Wills and Pious Convention in Late Medieval Bristol', *EHR*, 102 (1987), pp. 837-58, and 'Late Medieval Wills and Pious Convention: Testamentary Evidence Reconsidered', in Michael A. Hicks (ed.), *Profit, Piety and the Professions in Later Medieval England* (Gloucester: Sutton, 1990), pp. 14-33. Other articles written by him deal with various aspects of religious life in Bristol: see 'For the Increase of Divine Service: Chantries in the Parish in Late Medieval Bristol', *JEH*, 36 (1985), pp. 48-65, and 'A Service for the Dead: the Form and Function of the Anniversary in Late Medieval Bristol', *TBGAS*, 105 (1987), pp. 183-211. His most recent publication, apart from his edition of the All Saints' church book, is *The Parish Church and the Laity in Late Medieval Bristol* (Bristol: Bristol Historical Association, 1992).

13. Although technically the will was supposed to be concerned with disposal of land or real estate and the testament with moveable goods, in practice most men and women combined these two concerns into one document. Agnes Spicer (d. 1450) appears to have been the only Bristol testator to have left two documents, one detailing personal effects, the other property: see E. W. W. Veale (ed.), *The Great Red Book of Bristol. Part II.*, BRS 8 (1938), pp. 207-9.

14. Bristol, in common with other towns, set up a Court of Orphans to safeguard the interests of the orphans of wealthy burgess families and their guardians. The Great Orphan Book of Wills and the Register of Recognizances for Orphans in the Bristol Record Office are the surviving records of this court.

15. See n. 12 above for Clive Burgess, and Hicks, 'The Piety of Margaret, Lady Hungerford', pp. 19-20.

16. Burgess, 'Late Medieval Wills and Pious Convention', p. 129.

17. BRO, Great Orphan Book, ff. 114^{v}-115^{r}.

18. Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle*, p. 26, asserts that there are over 600 extant female wills for York: by comparison Bristol possesses less

than a sixth of that figure. Norman Tanner, *Church in Late Medieval Norwich*, pp. 114-5, states that of the 1,804 Norwich inhabitants who made wills between 1370-1532, just less than a third were made by women. The fact that far fewer wills were made by women in Bristol than in other provincial capitals is of interest, although difficult to account for. It should be pointed out, however, that the percentage of women who made wills throughout Somerset was only a little over 8 per cent, so there appears to be some regional correlation: see n. 22 below. There are very few extant wills for Gloucestershire women, so a comparison cannot easily be made regarding patterns of will-making.

19. The testamentary sources used for these figures include all male and female wills that were registered in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, the Great Orphan Book, Great Red Book and Little Red Book, as well as those to be found in Francis B. Bickley (ed.), *A Calendar of Deeds, chiefly relating to Bristol* (Edinburgh: Constable, 1899) and P. L. Strong, *All Saints' City, Bristol Calendar of Deeds* (Unpublished. London University Diploma in Archive Administration, 1967. Copy held in BRO). These comprise the vast majority of Bristol's medieval wills.

20. Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle*, pp. 268-9; see also M. M. Sheehan, 'The Influence of Canon Law on the Property Rights of Married Women in England', *Medieval Studies*, 25 (1963), pp. 109-24 (pp. 109, 202).

21. It may be noted that the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries also saw the largest number of single and married women testators in Bristol and other towns, a feature possibly related to the changing economic situation. This is discussed at greater length in Chapter 1, pp. 21-36 below.

22. A study of Somerset wills as a whole reveals that female will-making declined in the 1420s, and, as in Bristol, no female wills appear to be extant from the 1440s. A few women made wills between 1450-1470, but the number did not dramatically increase until the 1480s. Most of the wills for medieval Somerset are printed and can be found in Rev. F. W. Weaver, *Somerset Medieval Wills 1383-1500*, SRS 16 (1901), Thomas Bruce Dilks (ed.), *Bridgwater Borough Archives, 1200-1468*, SRS 48, 53, 58, 60 (1933-1948), and R. W. Dunning and T. D. Tremlett (eds.), *Bridgwater Borough Archives,1468-1485*, SRS 70 (1971).

23. On the book's compilation see the introduction in Clive Burgess (ed.), *The Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints'. Part I. The All Saints' Church Book*, BRS 46 (1995), pp. xv-xx.

24. See E. G. C. F. Atchley (ed.), 'On the Medieval Parish Records of the Church of St. Nicholas, Bristol', *Transactions of the St. Paul's Ecclesiological Society*, 6 (1910), pp. 35-67.

CHAPTER 1

BRISTOL AS A POLITICAL, SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND RELIGIOUS ENTITY IN THE LATE MIDDLE AGES, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE STATUS AND POSITION OF WOMEN WITHIN IT

Bristol in the Late Middle Ages: the Social and Political Community

The medieval city of Bristol, which lay in the two south-western counties of Somerset and Gloucestershire, possessed a number of characteristics which distinguished it from the surrounding towns and villages. Through size alone, Bristol stood out from its nearest neighbours. A city of some 10,000 people by 1500, it was small by modern standards and certainly much smaller than its modern counterpart, which now incorporates villages which then lay outside its boundaries, such as Clifton, Stapleton and Westbury-on-Trym on the Gloucestershire side, and Bedminster and Brislington to the south, in Somerset.[1] Yet, in the late medieval period, it was one of the largest cities in the realm along with Newcastle, Norwich and York, a major regional centre, and by the end of the period the second port after London. It was never, of course, totally isolated from the surrounding region. The growth of the cloth trade in the later fourteenth century meant that cloth manufactured in the smaller towns and villages was exported through the port of Bristol, and the city also traded in other goods such as fish and tin with the port of Bridgwater and other places situated further down the north Somerset, Devon and Cornwall coastline. Even so, in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, a number of factors, political, social and economic, may have contributed to making Bristol, at least as far as its wealthier citizens were concerned, more insular or inward-looking in character than other provincial capitals or the smaller surrounding towns of Gloucestershire and Somerset. As well as being situated in two counties, the city also lay in two separate dioceses. The larger part, those parishes north of the river, lay in the diocese of Worcester, while the smaller southern part, comprising the parishes of Redcliffe, Temple and St. Thomas, lay under the authority of the bishops of Bath and Wells. However,

in 1373, Bristol was made a county incorporate, so that the walled city north of the river and the suburbs to the south, which had been under the control of various lords, were united, becoming a single entity. This charter, the first of its kind in England, gave the citizens a number of privileges, including an increased jurisdictional authority, which allowed them to be answerable to their own borough courts rather than to those of the sheriffs of Somerset and Gloucestershire, a matter which had previously caused considerable friction, and the various manorial courts of those lords who possessed land within the city and its suburbs, which had also been a major bone of contention. The burgesses of Redcliffe in particular had frequently been at loggerheads with the Berkeleys, lords of the manor of Bedminster, over rights of jurisdiction.[2] Bristol, therefore, by the late fourteenth century, had considerably more control over its own affairs than other smaller but nevertheless significant borough communities in Somerset such as Bath, Bridgwater, Taunton and Wells.[3] Throughout the period, the city was governed by a mayor, sheriff and a Common Council of 'forty men of the better and more worthy men of the town, suburbs and precincts of the same', and, until the time of Henry VII, two town bailiffs were also chosen to serve.[4] Where anything is known of their backgrounds, the men who filled these positions were invariably those pre-eminent in Bristol's mercantile community.

Even so, although the city may have been controlled by a merchant oligarchy, as was also the case in other large cities in the late medieval period, the social make-up of its élite class may still have evolved and developed somewhat differently from them, the probable reason for this being related to Bristol's geographical position as a major trading community situated near the mouth of the Avon. As well as trading with local ports, it had, from the eleventh century, built up a flourishing trade with Ireland in fish, leather and cloth goods. In the thirteenth century, increased trade between England and Gascony, resulting from the union of the two crowns, enabled Bristol to

benefit economically, while in the fourteenth century trade with the Iberian peninsula assumed an increasing importance. By the late fourteenth century, it was one of England's chief exporters of cloth and a major importer of wine, all of which meant that its rise to national prominence was built almost entirely on trade and commerce, and that, unlike most of England's major provincial cities, it had not developed as an old Roman centre, or as an ecclesiastical or administrative centre.[5] More so perhaps than citizens of other large towns, its wealthier inhabitants appear to have had their roots in trade in the late medieval period. It has been suggested that the élite of urban society usually consisted of 'two overlapping groups, merchants and gentry', but this description is possibly less accurate when applied to Bristol in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, where the wealthiest citizens seem to have had fewer aspirations to gentility than elsewhere.[6] Although, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, a fair number of individuals from minor gentry families migrated from the surrounding countryside, they tended to stay within the urban community in which they prospered, marrying into other families of the élite there and not outside it.[7] Of course, this was not exclusively the case. The Chedder family played a prominent part in Bristol's affairs in the late fourteenth century, Robert Chedder, who held extensive lands around the Cheddar area in Somerset, serving twice as mayor of Bristol in the 1360s.[8] However, Robert's son Thomas married his offspring into noble and gentry families, the elder daughter, Joan, marrying the viscount de Lisle, son of the earl of Shrewsbury and grandson of Elizabeth Berkeley, countess of Warwick, as her second husband; while the younger, Isabel, married Sir John Newton of Yatton.[9] Philip Mede, another mayor of Bristol (d. 1474), saw his widowed daughter Isabel marry the younger brother of one of the lords of Berkeley (a marriage which, it may be noted, was deeply unpopular with other members of the Berkeley family, who considered it a 'base' match, perhaps on account of Isabel's mercantile background), while Joan, the daughter of Thomas Rowley,

one of Bristol's most eminent men in the late fifteenth century, married Roger Twynyhoo, esquire, of Cayford, Somerset.[10] On the whole though, intermarriage between wealthy Bristol families and local gentry families does not seem to have been a common or regular practice, and there would appear to have been far less noble and gentry presence in Bristol than in other large medieval towns (such as London and York) in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The Berkeleys, as lords of Redcliffe, which had been part of the manor of Bedminster, had once been fairly influential, but when they lost many of their jurisdictional priveleges to the burgesses of Bristol in 1331, their influence declined, and the city did not form strong links with any other noble or gentry family. Even such prominent families as the Chockes of Long Ashton, a few miles from Bristol, whilst owning some property within the city, appear to have had little to do with its affairs. A number of noble and gentry families, for the most part, those who had married into the Berkeley family, had holdings in Bristol, but did not generally choose to reside there, in contrast to places like York, where members of the aristocracy (such as Richard of Gloucester, brother to Edward IV, and the Percy earls of Northumberland) kept grand town houses and were regular visitors there.[11] The exceptions to this rule, as far as I have managed to uncover, were a few pious, gentry widows who appear to have had strong connections with some of the city's religious institutions in the later fifteenth century. This has important implications for a study of laywomen's piety within the urban community, as it is possible that the lack of interaction between urban and gentry groupings may have had an impact on the life-style and relationships of Bristol women of the élite class.[12] The wills of wealthy Bristol widows show that large female networks existed, but very few women appear to have had strong family or friendship links with noble or gentry women, or with women living outside the immediate urban community, which raises the question of whether the pious tastes and activities of women from Bristol's mercantile

families differed greatly from those aristocratic and gentry women living outside the city, or from those who occasionally lived within it.

As for links with other urban centres, Bristol testamentary evidence reveals only a few family connections with élites of smaller towns nearby. The Shipwards, for instance, wealthy merchants, married into the Phelips or Philips family, a leading clothier clan of Bath society, while there is evidence that branches of both the Shipward and Barstaple families, who had married into each other, allied themselves with wealthy families living in the small Wiltshire town of Marlborough in the late fifteenth century. Further afield, it is known that some Bristol merchants and their wives, including Elias and Agnes Spelly, and William and Agnes Canynges, were members of the large and wealthy religious guild of the Holy Trinity, St. Mary, St. John the Baptist and St. Katherine of Coventry.[13] These two couples were among the most prominent members of Bristol society in the late fourteenth century, with both William and Elias serving as mayor more than once. The wills of both Agnes Spelly (d. 1405) and her husband Elias (d. 1390), are of considerable interest for the nature of the pious bequests within them and are discussed in more detail elsewhere, but neither of them mentioned the guild, so the level or exact nature of their involvement in its activities, and their links or relationships with other members, is unclear. It would also be of interest to know, particularly as members of the Coventry guild are named in couples, whether women could join on their own behalf or only in partnership with their husbands. It is known that Coventry, as a centre of manufacturing for cloth, exported a fair amount of its material through the city, so that the links between the Bristol families and the guild most likely came about through Coventry traders using Bristol exporters.[14] It may be noted that the medieval Bristolian topographer, William Worcester, also had links with Coventry through his mother's line, but such connections or associations among the fifteenth-century Bristol élite do not appear to have been extensive.[15]

However, it should be pointed out that if Bristol differed somewhat from other urban communities, both large and small, by its socio-economic structure and was less open to outside influences, it was not necessarily a static society. Testamentary evidence shows that most urban families were not large, usually numbering no more than three children by the time of the death of one or other of the parents, and inevitably some families rose to more prominent positions as the male lines of others died out. Some, such as the Canynges, Sharp, Spicer and Young families, managed to span most of the period, but, as in other late medieval cities, only a small number appear to have survived for more than two or three generations. In the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries, the town élite was made up of such families as the Barstaples, Calfs, Gildeneys, Gloucesters, Spellys, and Warmynsters, whose lack of a male heir saw their demise. The second half of the fifteenth century saw the rise of Bakers, Chesters, Esterfelds, Meads, Parnaunts, Rowleys, and Shipwards. These families had a considerable impact on the religious life of the city, for it was their pious bequests which led to the embellishment of parish churches and chapels and the endowment of religious foundations. Many of the men served as churchwardens in their parish churches, and it is often the widows of these wealthy men who reveal the most about the nature of laywomen's piety in the urban community. It may be noted that as in other urban centres, burgage tenure, which allowed disposal of tenements more freely than of land held under the constraints of feudal law, made it easier for such wealthy individuals to leave immoveable goods to the church.

The Religious Community

The topography of medieval towns, especially the larger ones, with their vast number of parish churches, inevitably affected the religious outlook and pious tastes of their inhabitants, although Bristol, having eighteen parish churches,

was less well-endowed in this respect than other urban centres of a similar size, such as Norwich and York, both of which possessed more than twice that number. Yet, many of the parishes in Bristol, particularly the central ones such as All Saints', St. Ewen's and St. John's, were very small and their churches sited near one another, so that wealthy testators living in these parishes could often be found patronizing a number of the local churches.[16] To the local population living nearby in crowded conditions, the church served as a highly visible focus for their pious activities and aspirations, and surviving wills, deeds and churchwardens' accounts certainly testify to a thriving devotion to these buildings. It is also possible, of course, that small parishes and cramped living conditions provided a springboard for the spread of unorthodoxy, particularly with the proliferation of trades or crafts in certain parishes. Temple parish, for example, where the weaving craft flourished, saw Lollardy take a considerable hold in the fifteenth century.[17] Yet, however undesirable unorthodoxy might have been to the authorities, it nevertheless indicates that the inhabitants of medieval Bristol were by no means apathetic to religious matters or merely conventionally pious. It should be noted that the movement does not appear to have found any adherents among the élite. A few wills, it is true, do reveal a strong dislike of religious pomp and ostentation, but this does not necessarily indicate unorthodoxy.[18]

If Bristol had fewer churches than other large towns, it was well served by the religious orders, including an order of Augustinian canons, a small Benedictine abbey, four friaries, and for women, a tiny nunnery situated at the bottom of St. Michael's Hill. As well as the parish churches and religious houses, numerous chapels were sited in or near the city. Some of these were small and not easily accessible, such as the hermitage chapels of St. Vincent of 'Gyston-clyff' cut into the rock high above the river Avon, and that of St. Brendan, a local saint, which was situated on the top of Brandon Hill. A few, such as the chapel of the Assumption of the Blessed Mary on Bristol bridge,

which had religious guilds attached to them, were more magnificent affairs.[19]

As elsewhere, Bristol possessed a number of craft, parish and religious guilds, although most of the evidence pertaining to these is to be found in wills, in which only five are mentioned with any frequency. No Bristol guilds are listed in the returns of 1388-9, and there are no surviving guild accounts, apart from those few set down among the muniments of the craft guild of St. John the Baptist, and those recorded in the church book of All Saints' relating to the guild of the Holy Name of Jesus, founded in the fifteenth century, which met in that church.[20] Two of the guilds about which we know the most, those of St. John the Baptist and St. Katherine, which met respectively in the churches of St. Ewen and Temple, and which, as is evident from testamentary evidence, were the most well-patronized, were ostensibly craft guilds, although the craft and religious elements of their organizations appear to have been intertwined and of equal importance. Some, such as the abovementioned wealthy fraternity of the Assumption of the Blessed Mary, attached to the chapel on Bristol bridge, and founded in the mid-fourteenth century, were male-only preserves, although two, the Kalendars' guild, founded in the thirteenth century, and that of the Blessed Mary of the Bellhouse attached to St. Peter's church, which came into existence in the late fifteenth century, had women members, the latter appearing to have been particularly well-patronized by the female sex.[21] The Kalendars' guild, which met in All Saints' church, was one of Bristol's most prominent guilds consisting of religious and lay members, the latter being both male and female. By the late fifteenth century, its functions included keeping the public library founded by Bishop Carpenter in 1464 and housed in the attic above the north aisle of All Saints' church.[22] Overall though, there is not a great deal of evidence to be found relating to the involvement of the laity, particularly the female laity, with religious guilds in Bristol.[23]

The medieval city also possessed a substantial number of almshouses and

hospitals, the largest of these being St. Mark's or the Gaunt's Hospital, which housed male brethren, but which also came to play an important role in the lives of a group of pious gentry women living in or near Bristol in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, a matter discussed in the next chapter. Other charitable institutions included the leper hospital of St. Mary Magdalene and the hospital of St. Katherine, both situated in the suburbs just beyond Redcliffe, while within Redcliffe itself was sited the hospital of St. John facing St. Mary Redcliffe church. Around the Old Market area to the east of the city centre stood Barstaple's Hospital, which housed infirm men and women, and the older foundation of the hospital of St. Laurence, originally built for lepers.

Although it has been suggested that 'study of religious mores in Bristol has failed to reveal any particularly noteworthy innovation in the basic processes of piety in the century or two before the Reformation',[24] it is evident that devotion to churches and chapels flourished and that there was keen participation by the city's inhabitants in religious processions and the feast days of certain saints, large urban communities being places where such processions and celebrations were undertaken with considerable enthusiasm and vigour.[25] The churchwardens' accounts for All Saints', St. Ewen's and St. John's, and the inventory book of St. Stephen's, make frequent reference to the Corpus Christi procession, while Margery Kempe, in her spiritual autobiography, when relating her experiences in the city in the early part of the fifteenth century, described how 'þe prestys born þe Sacrament a-bowte þe towne wyth solempne processyon, wyth meche lyth & gret solempnyte, as was worthy to do,' while she followed 'ful of terys & deuocyon'.[26] The visual aspect of religion was all-important, and town governments, in their attempts to impose order and harmony upon the civic entity, often encouraged such celebrations and activities. In Bristol, members of the urban élite played a significant part in the celebration of the Feasts of St. Katherine and St.

Clement, although their involvement can be said to have had important consequences for the nature of male and female veneration of the saint.[27] Devotional and liturgical trends and changes (such as the widespread popularity of the cult of the Holy Name of Jesus in the later fifteenth century) were also, perhaps, easier to detect in towns. As in other cities, the cult of the Holy Name appears to have been popular in Bristol, especially among the wealthier parishioners of All Saints' church, and evidence suggests that a number of pious widows played an active part in its cultivation and promotion there. Finally, it is worth pointing out that a number of social and economic factors, such as a higher mortality rate brought about by cramped and unhygienic living conditions, may have contributed towards forming a religiosity and pious outlook within the urban community, which differed in some aspects from the more rural settlements and communities surrounding it.

The Social and Economic Position of Women within the Late Medieval Urban Community

There is no doubt that living in a large urban community provided a different backdrop, a different set of rules and conditions, against which women lived out their lives, although whether women actually enjoyed more freedom in urban society than elsewhere is a contentious issue, and I do not intend to imply that their experiences were totally different from those of their more rural sisters. To a degree, wherever women lived, they faced the same social, legal and political constraints, and the fact that urban women could play no part in town government effectively denied them a political voice. Freedom, or at least, the ability to control one's own life, to a certain extent almost certainly depended on class, marital status and the economic position of a particular town or region. It is possible that for women from the property-owning classes, burgage tenure, as opposed to land held under feudal law, may have been advantageous. Certainly, although there is no clear overall pattern, the wills of male testators from Bristol show that property was often divided

into varying proportions or even equally between widows, sons and daughters, demonstrating a clear desire to provide adequately for all family members.[28]

It has been suggested that during certain periods of relative economic prosperity, some women in some towns may have experienced more freedom than women elsewhere. Caroline Barron, and more recently Jeremy Goldberg, have suggested that the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries constituted a 'Golden Age' for women, and that the economic changes or acceleration of existing trends brought about by the Black Death opened up greater working opportunities for women in urban communities, giving them more control over certain aspects of their lives. Conversely, in times of worsening economic circumstances, such as the second half of the fifteenth century or even perhaps before, these opportunities decreased, with women possibly being forced back into a more marginal position.[29] It can be argued that this influenced the lives of women from élite groupings less directly, but its impact on patriarchal authorities may well have affected the way in which women generally were viewed in medieval society. It should be pointed out that not all historians of women's social and economic position in the late medieval period subscribe precisely to this view. Judith Bennett, while not directly disputing the argument as far as I can tell, has played down the concept of a 'Golden Age' for women, arguing instead for a greater degree of continuity in their status and circumstances throughout the period, and indeed, well beyond it. According to this theory, women's position was subject only to 'small and temporary' changes brought about by economic fluctuations which, furthermore, affected a 'tiny minority of women.'[30] More recently, Sandy Barsley, looking at women's wages, has argued that in the period after the Black Death women did not gain economically as substantially as some historians have suggested and therefore may have 'experienced the post-plague period as more grey than golden.'[31] However, it is certainly the case that in a number of towns the attitude of civic authorities appears to have hardened

towards women and other marginal groups as the fifteenth century wore on, to the extent of passing legislation which at best can be said to have regulated and supervised female activities more closely, and at worst curtailed women's freedom of choice and movement. Obviously, the situation varied from place to place, but town governments or ruling élites, particularly those of the larger urban communities where there was a diversity of social groupings in close proximity to one another, were always well aware of the greater potential for disorder and the need to promote civic harmony to maintain order and stability. Furthermore, economic depression and decline could generate fear in medieval society, being seen partly as divine retribution for mankind's sinfulness on earth, and leading to anxiety that the social and moral order was under threat. Hence, any alteration in the status quo, apparent or real, such as a change in the economic and social position of women, might be viewed with suspicion and decisions taken to subject their activities to closer investigation and control. Thus it is possible that, in times of economic recession, patriarchal values may have been more forcefully propounded. Hull and Coventry can be cited as examples of towns which passed restrictive, even draconian, legislation against women, with the weavers of the former excluding women from the craft in 1490, and the civic authorities of the latter in 1492 insisting that 'no senglewoman, beyng in good hele & myghty in body to labour within þe age of l [fifty] yeres, take nor kepe frohensfurth housez nor chambres be them-self; nor that [they] take eny Chambre within eny oþer persone but þat they go to seruice till they be maried', the penalty for a first offence being a fine, and, for a second, imprisonment. Three years later, the age limit was reduced to forty, but any 'Maide & sole woman' who refused to abide by this law was ultimately 'to voyde þe cite'.[32]

As far as Bristol was concerned, it seems that social and economic change may have been less catastrophic than in other cities of similar size, and that, although the Black Death hit the city quite badly, it managed to sustain a

steady recovery, appearing to escape the economic blight that affected urban centres like York in the second half of the fifteenth century.[33] However, although Bristol may have suffered less from an economic downturn, it is significant that the civic authorities, while not passing such restrictive legislation as some others, seem to have thought that, by the mid-fifteenth century, the employment of women had contributed to the problem of unemployed and vagrant males in the city and that measures should be taken to end this state of affairs. A weaver's ordinance of 1461 which was 'aggreed, ordeigned, and assented by William Canynges, Maire of the Towne of Bristowe, Thomas Kempson, Sherif of the same, and all the Comune Councell of the said Towne of Bristowe', stated that

> for asmuche as divers persons of Weuers Crafte of the said Towne of Bristowe puttyn, occupien and hiren ther wyfes, doughtours and maidens, some to weue in ther owne lombes and some to hire them to wirche with othour persons of the seid Crafte, by the whiche many and divers of the Kynges liege people likkely men to do the Kyng seruis in his warris and in the defence of this his lond, and sufficiently lorned in the seid Crafte, gothe vagaraunt and vnoccupied and may not haue ther labour to ther levyng, Therefor that no person of the seid Crafte of Weuers within this seid Towne of Bristowe fro this day foreward sett, putt or hire his seid wyfe, doughter or maide to no suche occupacion of weuyng.

The only exceptions were to be those men whose wives were already involved in weaving 'at the makyng of thes acte', who were to be allowed to 'occupy ther seid wyfes duryng ther naturall lyfe of the seid women in maner and fourme as thei didden tofore the makyng of thes seide acte'. Anyone disobeying this injunction was to be fined 6s 8d every time he was found to break it.[34] This piece of legislation, perhaps prompted by economic and political factors whose effects must have been felt some decades before, may have been symptomatic of a generally increasing resentment and suspicion of women's activities and position in society. Clearly, this sort of regulation applied to, or affected more obviously or directly the lives of women from the less affluent groups of society, but it strikes me that it might well also reflect increasingly negative perceptions of women in general and a desire to

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circumscribe or supervise their activities more closely. It is equally possible that women adjusted their lives or thought processes to accommodate this, something which at times was reflected in their pious and devotional lives, particularly perhaps in the sphere of charitable giving, but also in such areas as their relationship with female religious communities, something which is discussed in greater depth further on.

Some Observations on the Socio-Economic Position of Women as it relates particularly to Bristol

Some of the socio-economic factors that may have contributed towards shaping the social make-up of Bristol and the mentality of its inhabitants have already been discussed, but it seems appropriate here to make a few observations about social status and life within the urban community as it relates particularly to women. It is not always possible to identify with certainty the exact social status of individuals, but overwhelmingly, where this can be determined, the women come from backgrounds of considerable affluence.[35] Women such as Maud Baker, Isabel Barstaple, Elizabeth Bayly, Alice Chester, Maud Esterfeld, Margaret Gildeney, Margaret Gloucester, and Agnes Spelly were either daughters or wives, frequently both, of the very wealthy mercantile élite who served as town mayors and aldermen and who feature so prominently in the surviving civic records and overseas trade accounts of Bristol. Some of these women are known to have become or to have remained involved in running their husband's trade or business after his death. Alice Chester, for example, the wife of a wealthy draper, participated in trading ventures to Ireland, Spain and Portugal after the decease of her spouse, while Maud Baker, wealthy benefactress of All Saints', whose husband had been a grocer by trade, was clearly keen in her 1503 will to make arrangements for the continuing education of her grocer apprentices.[36] Other prominent Bristol widows known to have traded in their own name in the later medieval period included Margaret and Joan Rowley, members of the Rowley family mentioned

earlier, who were patrons of St. John's church and some of whom acted as mayors and aldermen in the late fifteenth century.[37] In a number of ways, urban women from these very wealthy family backgrounds formed a group of their own in society, distinct from their poorer urban sisters and also from noble and gentry women. However, although not subject to the constraints of feudal law regarding property and marriage, they may have shared some common life experiences with noble women, such as being married at a very young age. Maud Baker, for instance, had a daughter already married at thirteen, although the girl was not at that point living with her husband. It is evident that two of her other daughters were also married by their mid-teens. Not surprisingly, it is women from the wealthiest strata of Bristol society who appear to have been the most conspicuous by their pious deeds, probably because they had greater wealth to donate to religious and charitable institutions and perhaps more time to devote to pious activities. Certainly, the source material reveals most about the pious inclinations and activities of women from the most prosperous families. Thus it is they who feature predominantly in this study. There were, however, a few high-born women who did not come from a mercantile background, but who formed strong attachments to some of Bristol's religious houses. These women tended to come from the upper to middling classes of the gentry (such as the Guildfords of Surrey and the Cornwalls of Burford, Shropshire), rather than the nobility.

Other women who enjoyed a non-mercantile or less exalted background in town society still appear to have come from reasonably prosperous families and were married or had been married to men who, while not serving in high urban office, probably owned thriving and fairly lucrative businesses. Women from this social grouping were clearly sometimes actively involved in the practical day-to-day running of the business and there is evidence that some even trained female apprentices. They included women like the twice-widowed

Alice Wodeford, who, in her 1407 will, left to 'Johane, apprenticie mee' [Joan, my apprentice] two coverlets, five and a half ells 'de westvale', and a four-gallon pot.[38] She did not mention her particular craft, but it was clearly connected with the manufacture of cloth. However, whether a woman had always traded in her own name independently of her husband, or whether she had merely continued to run her husband's business after his death, is not always clear. Agnes Hert, a widow of the parish of St. Nicholas, who made her will in 1493, made frequent reference to the 'mercimonia et instrumenta artis in shopa mea' [the merchandise and tools of the craft in my shop]. Agnes does not appear to have moved among the wealthiest section of society, but the references to various furnaces and iron tools around her house and shop suggest a thriving business involved with the production of iron instruments. These articles were left to various individuals whom she referred to as 'seruientes' although the nature of the bequests, which seem to indicate that a degree of specialised knowledge was needed to use them, suggests that they may in fact have been apprentices or qualified craftsmen who worked for her. William Hert, who died just before his wife, and made his will in the same year, described himself as 'burgensie' and left considerable property to Agnes, but made no mention of the shop or the business, so it is possible that she may have traded as *femme sole.*[39] However, far fewer wills seem to be extant for women from this type of background, apart from the period between 1380-1420, when many single and married women made wills, a number of them appearing to be from non-élite origins.[40] From these documents, we can deduce a small amount about their religious inclinations and pious activity. As far as the poorer sections of society are concerned, we are much less well-informed as to their position in society, life-style and piety, although churchwardens' accounts sometimes refer to small sums of money paid to individual women (probably of humble status) for washing church vestments or making altar cloths. The accounts of All Saints' in 1472-3, for

example, record that 4d was paid to 'Isabell Wyn for making 2 of the best altar cloths and the best houseling towel that Mistress Chestre gave.'[41] It is of interest to note here the possible link between this woman and Alice Chester, one of All Saints' most prestigious benefactresses. Perhaps we learn the most about the poorest women in relation to female piety by studying them as the recipients of the charity of others, although this gives us little or no information about their own pious inclinations or experiences. I should like to end this chapter by looking at issues related to marital status and the life cycle as they relate particularly to urban women, for they throw further light on some of the issues raised or discussed above, including that of women's social and economic status and its relationship to and possible effect upon female pious inclination and manifestation.

Marital Status, Life Cycle and Female Piety in the Urban Community as they relate to Social and Economic Factors, with Special Reference to Testamentary Evidence

Marital status, as a factor which arguably affected the nature of female piety and certainly bore an influence on the amount and type of evidence available for a study of this sort, is an issue of considerable importance particularly as it relates to a discussion of female piety in the larger urban community in the later medieval period. While most of the testamentary evidence relates to men and women of the wealthier sections of society, as far as women are concerned it also relates mostly to widows, which gives the impression that they were the most piously-inclined or active group of laywomen in medieval society, or at least that it was not until widowhood that women formulated distinct and fervent forms of pious expression. Obviously, this was not entirely the case: the memoirs of Margery Kempe, a woman born and bred in an urban community, reveal that she was possessed of an intense and ardent pious devotion from her youth, a devotion which she increasingly found to conflict with those duties required of her as a wife. Yet to some extent, the picture

of the older widowed woman much devoted to or concerned with acts of piety may be an accurate one, although it is unlikely that the nature of a woman's piety changed overnight on becoming a widow, and there may be some difficulty in knowing whether and how far the pious inclinations and beliefs expressed in the will of a widowed woman reflected beliefs held and practices followed throughout a lifetime or only in her years of widowhood. However, it seems likely that some widows, particularly those who had been married two or three times, may have reached an age or a stage in the female life cycle when, having fulfilled the role of wife and mother, spiritual and religious concerns assumed a greater importance.[42] Widowed women were also in a position to give greater expression to their religious beliefs. On a purely practical level, they may have had more time on their hands to pursue religious projects or to follow more exacting devotional regimes, while legally, they were not subject to the same constraints as married women and could leave goods or money to individuals or religious institutions, or perhaps choose to fund building projects within the parish church or elsewhere, more or less as they pleased. By contrast, the position of a married woman as a subordinate partner within the marital relationship militated against her acting on her own initiative or independently of her husband; hence it is more difficult to uncover evidence of a woman's life, including the pious and devotional side, while she was married than when she was a widow.

Judging by the Bristol evidence, it is rare to find a married woman acting on her own pious initiative; it was almost always the case that she did so in partnership with her husband. Such cases can be found in the All Saints' church book, where, for example, John and Christine Haddon were recorded as donating a large sum of money 'to the building of Our Lady Chapel' in the church of All Saints' in their lifetime, while a deed of 1443 shows that they also contributed money to the rebuilding of the Kalendars' house. The gifts were most likely donated in the previous decade.[43] Two prodigious

benefactors to the same church in the 1430s and 1440s were Joan and Thomas Halleway, with Thomas, who acted as mayor in 1434, also serving more than once as churchwarden.[44] Husband and wife were named as joint donors of '1 worshipful jewel with 2 angels called a monstrance to bear the precious sacrament with divers relics [en]closed in the same, of 57¼ozs', a 'mass book to the high altar,' the sum of £20 'to the best suit of vestments' and the same sum 'to the building of the Cross Aisle', while they also commissioned 'the seats in the church before St. Dunstan's altar'.[45] Their most well-documented activity was the founding of a perpetual chantry in All Saints' church between 1449-1452. Perpetual chantry foundations were comparatively rare by this period, so the undertaking by husband and wife was unusual, but the Halleway chantry appears to have been a lavish and carefully thought-out foundation, with Joan being responsible for bringing the whole process to a conclusion, Thomas having died in the meanwhile.[46] However, in cases like this, it is difficult to know from which partner the original desire to donate came. or whether in fact the decision was taken jointly by husband and wife. It may be a demonstration of the influence a wife could have over her husband's activities; alternatively, it may demonstrate a woman channelling her pious impulses or ambitions through her husband; or yet again the wife may have been linked merely by association. Naturally, it is likely that husband and wife shared some of the same religious tastes and inclinations, and so it may have been felt that there was little need for a wife to act on her own initiative or to make separate pious provision. Yet it may also be argued that the restrictions placed upon women by partriarchal society made it difficult for the pious expression of married women to manifest itself independently, the experiences of Margery Kempe, and the negative reactions she often faced from those around her, perhaps being a case in point.

Furthermore, while she was married, a women was not free to make a will without her husband's permission, which inevitably affected the number of

married women making wills and possibly the content of those wills. Consequently, most wills were left by widows, and these documents were on the whole longer and more detailed than those left by married women. A study of the testamentary evidence in the Great Orphan Book indicates that marital status affected the content of male wills far less. It may also be noted that where the wills of husband and wife can be compared, it is generally although not exclusively the case that the longer a woman had been widowed the more the pious provision and instructions left by her differed from those made by her husband, whereas when she died soon after him, her wishes and pious arrangements more closely resembled his, which again indicates that marital status had some effect on female pious expression.

These comments apply to wills made by women in both urban and rural areas, but the question is of particular interest as regards Bristol and other urban communities in the late medieval period, because there are fascinating trends regarding patterns of will-making by female testators which may have been linked to changing social and economic factors. Throughout the period 1370-1500, nearly 79 per cent of female testators in Bristol were widows, but this statistic disguises the important periodical fluctuations within this number. The number of widows making wills greatly increased as the fifteenth century wore on, particularly from the 1480s, but in the short period from 1380-1399 the combined number of single and married women who made wills was actually slightly higher than that made by widowed women. Furthermore, this shows parallels with patterns of female will-making in other large urban centres, and it appears from studies done so far that the phenomenon was exclusively an urban one.[47]

It will be of use to look at some of these wills in more detail, as from them we can deduce something more of social status and the possible effect of marital status on pious expression. Three women testators, Joan Seys (d.1395), Elena Barry (d.1396), and Margaret Gloucester (d.1420), can be

positively identified as unmarried. Joan Seys described herself as 'Joanna Seys, filia Johannis Seys, glasyer', while Margaret Gloucester stated that she was the 'filia et heres Thome Gloucestere, nuper burgensie ville Bristolle' [daughter and heir of Thomas Gloucester, late burgess of the town of Bristol]. Elena Barry did not mention her parents but mentioned her uncle, Master Stephen Barry. None of them mentioned a husband or children.[48] There appear to have been fewer unmarried testators for Bristol than for other large urban centres, but the number still appears to have been higher than for Somerset as a whole, where I have found no one definite instance of a single woman making a will.[49]

In the medieval period, women who did not marry were few in number, so for this reason the three were unusual. It should be pointed out that this period also saw the highest number of unmarried laymen making wills, although they too only made up a very small proportion of all male testators. However, it is worth noting that these female wills were made between 1395-1420, lying within that period which has been suggested as a possible "Golden Age" for women by some historians, a period when, because of favourable economic (and social) conditions, they perhaps had greater freedom and control over their lives than in previous or later periods.[50] It is possible that in times when working opportunities were greater for women, such as the later fourteenth century, they had more freedom of choice over the issue of marriage and whether to enter into it or not. Indeed, Jeremy Goldberg, observing a similar trend with the York evidence, has suggested that 'the high proportion of single female testators observed in the earlier decades of the fifteenth century... would accord with the hypothesis that when work opportunities for women were enhanced, many women might have chosen to delay marriages and some women might not have married at all.'[51] It therefore follows that when opportunities were less plentiful, marriage may have been seen as virtually the only option open to women to maintain a decent

standard of living. It may also have been the case that in the more prosperous early fifteenth century single women, whatever their class, and whether or not they worked for a living, were regarded with less suspicion than in later periods, when, as a result of the worsening economic situation, attempts seem to have been made in a number of places to force them into states of dependency. Although, as previously mentioned, Bristol may have suffered less than other towns from an economic downturn in the later fifteenth century, this trend in the testamentary evidence indicates that the city was perhaps not immune from the psychological effects of depression. The decline in single female testators may reflect the fact that women of single status felt inhibited from making wills or that there were actually fewer of them. Personal choice may have played a part in the decision of these Bristol women not to marry, but it is of interest to note that their social origins were not necessarily one and the same, even if none of them came from poor backgrounds. One, Margaret Gloucester, came from a family of considerable affluence, being the daughter of a wealthy and prominent citizen, Thomas Gloucester, who served as sheriff in 1403/4. His lengthy will, made in 1407, divided his goods and substantial property holdings between Margaret and her older married sister, Agnes, and he appears to have assumed that Margaret would marry, for his will states that the properties he left to her were afterwards to go to her lawful issue.[52] It is puzzling why Margaret, daughter of a wealthy townsman, should have remained unmarried and it seems unlikely that extreme youth can be put forward as a reason for non-marriage. From the testamentary evidence, it is clear that at least thirteen years had passed from the death of her father to her own, and his will reveals that Agnes, her sister, was already married before he died, so unless there was a large age gap between the two, Margaret was unlikely to have been very young.

The background of the other two women is less certain. The statement of Joan Seys that her father was a glazier would suggest that her family was of

artisan rather than mercantile status. However, as Heather Swanson has pointed out, the general lack of evidence relating to the craft 'makes assessing the place of the glazier in the medieval town extremely tricky'. Yet, using evidence from York, she states that, despite the difficulty in tracing them in civic records, it is evident that 'the leading glaziers were held in considerable esteem'.[53] There is no information to be found on those who engaged in the craft among the ordinances and regulations of the various crafts and trades set down in the Little Red Book, and there is no trace of a Seys family in the Bristol records as far as I can tell, but it is clear that the will of a woman of single artisan status is unusual in Bristol, most of the female wills being made by the widowed élite. It would, of course, be of interest to know whether Joan had any involvement in or connection with her father's trade, but whatever the case, she seems to have been a woman of some wealth, owning lands and tenements in Bristol, Brislington and Taunton in Somerset. Very little can be deduced of Elena Barry's origins from her very short will, and the surname does not occur in any of the civic records. She mentioned only a tenement which had been left to her 'ex dono et feoffemento Magistri Stepheni Barry, auunculi mei' [by the gift and feoffment of Master Stephen Barry, my uncle], which gives little clue as to the extent of her wealth. She bequeathed it, along with the residue of her goods, to William Clerk, perhaps a relative, whom she describes as 'mercer', which may be indicative of a mercantile background. The fact that of all her family she mentioned only her uncle (perhaps a member of the secular clergy), suggests that she was an orphan and that he had played some part in her upbringing. Many members of the élite had sons known to have joined the ranks of the secular clergy, but it was not exclusive to their class, so this cannot be used definitively to ascertain her social status.[54]

Whatever the case, it can be argued that these unmarried women, like widows, were women with some freedom of action. Two of them certainly

appear to have been wealthy or reasonably well off, and could presumably dispose of their land as they wished (providing that there were no stipulations as to family inheritance), and were possibly free of parental influence. However, unlike the wills of widows, the wills of these women were brief and did not go into a great deal of detail regarding pious arrangements. I mention this in particular because such wills appear to contrast greatly with the wills of unmarried laymen, who, as well as naming a number of individual male religious, made very specific and often elaborate arrangements, something which they were perhaps able to do because they had fewer dependants than their married counterparts.[55] Yet, as the same can be said of the wealthy single women mentioned, the difference is all the more surprising. Certainly, they did not neglect to make provision. Joan Seys asked to be buried 'in capella de Sancte Maria in ecclesie parochiali Sancte Augustini' [in the chapel of St. Mary in the parish church of St. Augustine], leaving the usual bequests to the vicar and church fabric. She stated that her property holdings in Bristol and Taunton were to be sold and the money raised thereby to be used 'ad inveniendum capellanum seu capellanos' [to find a chaplain or chaplains] to pray for her soul, that of her parents and all the faithful dead in the church of St. Augustine, but she did not leave instructions for anything more specific. Elena Barry's much briefer will stipulated burial in the cemetery of St. Augustine's and left the usual bequests to vicar, parish clerk and church fabric, although she also left money for the vicar of St. Augustine's to celebrate '1 trentale missarum' [a trental of masses]. Margaret Gloucester's lands were all left to her sister Agnes and her husband, John Cotton, and, as regards pious provision, only the 'residuum totum vestimentarum mearum' [all the residue of my clothing] was to be distributed in pious works for the good of her soul, those of her parents and all the faithful dead, although this bequest is unusual in the sense that female testators usually left items of clothing to individual women, rather than requesting them to be distributed at

random. (It is possible that there was a stipulation on the bequest of the property left to her by her father, limiting her ability to bequeath it where she wanted if she produced no heirs to pass it on to). She desired to be buried 'inter fratres Carmelitarum.' The Carmelite order of friars was popular with women in Bristol throughout the period, but it is possible that Margaret's request may have been the result less of a personal attachment to that order than a desire to be buried 'iuxta tumulum nuper patris mei' [next to the tomb of my father].[56]

Although the very small number of unmarried women's wills is perhaps insufficient evidence upon which to base firm conclusions about female pious preferences and inclinations, the brevity and lack of specification as regards such matters as pious provision in these documents provides some contrast with those of widows. Rarely are bequests left to religious institutions other than the testator's parish church, while fewer gifts of a personal or religious nature are left to individuals, either secular or religious. This, I believe, may reflect something about medieval society's traditional expectations of unmarried women. Despite their apparent independence, they appear to have been closest to and much influenced by their nearest blood-kin, more so than married or widowed women, with two out of the three mentioning prayers only for themselves and their parents. Margaret Gloucester asked to be buried by her father and left her property to her sister and brother-in-law. Furthermore, these wills do not show much evidence of the pattern of female networking and friendships that appear to be a fairly distinctive feature of the wills of urban widows. Margaret Gloucester, some of whose bequests to other women were religious in nature, named more than the other two, leaving a chaplet of pearls to her sister Agnes, 'par precularium mearum de coraille' [a pair of my coral beads] to Alice atte Rode, and a gown and 'kurtill' to Margaret Grove, whose relationship to her was unspecified in both cases.[57] Joan Seys left a few household goods to Alice Bawden, while Elena Barry merely left a small money

bequest to a Joan Brewer, both of these legatees perhaps being servants, although it is by no means clear. The issue is of some importance when tracing the nature of female piety, as it appears from the wills of widowed women that pious or religious affiliations sometimes grew from or were strengthened through these networks. Unless a woman entered upon a religious vocation, in which case her pious inclinations were channelled along a completely different path, it can be argued that the multiple experiences of marriage, motherhood and widowhood were, perhaps, the most formative influences upon female piety, causing it to follow or assume particular or distinct forms, and that it was not until widowhood that it could express itself in an independent manner.

As the wills of unmarried testators are only to be found in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, so also are most of the wills left by married women. In the short period from 1375-1399, 50 per cent of female wills were made by married women. The years 1400-1424 saw a decline in the number of married women making wills to 18 per cent of all female testators, with only one of these being made after 1410, that of Margaret Stephens in 1417. I have uncovered one other such will, or part or a will, dated 1440, among the records of the company of St. John the Baptist, but after this, no more wills appear to have been made or registered by a married woman for over half a century.[58] Again, this appears to have been a feature of urban communities as similar trends have been found for towns such as York and Rochester, although why it should have been confined to urban areas is difficult to establish.[59] Perhaps it reflects the fact that temporary economic and social freedoms gained by women were greater in the urban community. While research on female will-making in the Somerset region shows some similarities with Bristol, it has failed to throw up large numbers of wills made by married females at any period, even taking into account that testamentary survival rates differ slightly from place to place. A possible exception may

have been the small urban centre of Bridgwater, where the testamentary evidence reveals a slightly higher proportion of wills made by married women in the late fourteenth century.[60] Although the making of wills by married women was permitted by canon law, it has been suggested that the fall in their number in the fifteenth century may reflect a growing bias against this practice. As early as 1344, 'the commons complained in parliament that the prelates had made a constitution sanctioning the testaments of wives and villeins, and that this was against reason', and the issue seems to have continued to be a bone of contention well into the sixteenth century.[61] Possibly it intensified in the post-plague world when social relationships had been changed by economic circumstances, and women, along with other subordinate groups, had gained or were seen by those in authority to have gained certain freedoms which it was later thought desirable to curb. Even though the decline in the number of married women making wills can be observed in other parts of the country, although not completely uniformly, it may be that, as far as Bristol was concerned, it was also connected with or exacerbated by the arrival and onset of Lollardy in the community, as it seems to have occurred at approximately the same time as adherence to Lollardy increased. Lollard preachers had been particularly active in Bristol and the surrounding area from the late fourteenth century, and from 1415-1430 a number of people were prosecuted as heretics in Bristol, including one woman, a Christina More. In the 1440s, more people, many having links with the weaving community in the city, were involved in heretical activity and brought before the bishops of Worcester on such counts. After 1460, the number of people accused of heresy appears to have declined, although three Bristol men were charged with heretical offences as late as 1476.[62] There is no indication that any of the women under discussion here had Lollard links, but the general increase in such activity, which was associated with sedition and a challenge to established authority, may have made the ecclesiastical authorities less inclined

to be seen to defend the right of married women, supposedly subject to their husbands' authority, to act in a way that might undermine that authority, even if permission had to be sought by the wife of her spouse before making the will. It would be of interest to know why some of these married urban women felt compelled to make a will. Only two of them specifically stated that they were made with the permission of their husbands, although in most of the other cases the husbands were named as executors, so clearly their consent had been given. The content of the wills themselves does not always give much indication as to why they were written, for, like the wills of single women, they are generally much briefer and less specific in their instructions and bequests, religious or otherwise, than are the wills of widowed women. However, there are some differences in their form and content, and it may also be noted that a number of them are not made by women from the élite class, again unlike those of widowed women, which may indicate that this was a period when women other than those from the wealthiest classes in urban society had the inclination or ability, perhaps because of increased freedom or wealth, to make a will.

I will confine this discussion of the wills of married women to those registered in the Great Orphan Book, of which all but one were made between 1389-1417. Of these early testatrices, none mentioned any children (although the husband of one of them, Margery Wales, mentioned a daughter who may have been the offspring of this or a previous marriage), so they were possibly young women, not married for many years. It may be noted that where something of their origins can be deduced, they were often not from élite backgrounds, although most of them seemed to have been married to reasonably prosperous men. The wills are generally brief and were possibly made primarily to clarify property arrangements, which is of interest in view of the fact that a married woman's property was deemed to belong to her husband. The wills also suggest that this was property they had brought to

the marriage and over which they had some power of disposal; or it may have had stipulations and conditions attached to it so that it would pass back to the wife's kin after her death and/or that of her husband. The husband's life interest was recognised, but property was often left to or reverted to members of the woman's own family, although sometimes the married female testator specified that the particular property she had brought to the marriage was to be sold for the benefit of her soul. Generally, however, the religious provision made, while not ungenerous, did not go into great detail. Two of the wills were very short. Amy Weston's will of 1392, in which she described herself as 'Amicia, vxor Johanis Weston, baker', indicates relatively humble origins.[63] Indeed, Heather Swanson in her work on medieval artisans, using York evidence, has stated that 'bakers of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries can be shown from their wills to be fairly insignificant in terms of wealth and status', although she does provide examples of a few who became quite wealthy.[64] To her husband Amy bequeathed the residue of her goods and a tenement 'ad terminum vite sue', which was afterwards to be sold, and the money distributed in masses and alms for the souls of Thomas Bristelton, Juliana his wife and their daughter Amicia (who were probably blood relatives), along with her husband after his death, their progenitors and all the faithful dead. Apart from this instruction, she merely left the usual small legacies to the vicar and each priest celebrating at her funeral rites.

The will of Christina Chesewell, dated 1407, was even briefer and again mostly concerned with the disposal of property, namely, six shops, a curtilage and a croft on Redcliffe Hill, which was held by her husband John for his life, but the reversion of which, 'post mortem predicti Johanis' [after the death of the said John], was to go to a Robert Nemot, his wife Margaret and their heirs. I have not come across either of these names in other documents, and it is therefore difficult to fit Christina into any particular social grouping, although her will, which refers to her husband as 'burgensie', suggests that

they were well-possessed of property. Apart from the property, the rest of her goods and belongings were left to her husband 'ad disponendum pro anima mea prout sibi melius videbitur expedire' [to dispose of for the good of my soul as it shall seem to him most expedient].[65] The will of Margaret Stephens (d. 1417), the last surviving will of a married woman for over twenty years, gives few clues as to her background, although she instructed that various property rents were to go to a John Herford, clerk, and her right or state in 'quoddam shopum' [a certain shop] to her husband John. It is a pity that her relationship to the former is unspecified, as the bequests he received appear to have been quite generous. Instructions for pious provision were again minimal, stating desired place of burial in St. Leonard's, and leaving the conventional money bequests to the vicar and clerk there, but also to Sir John Bole, chaplain.[66]

The wills of some of the other women, such as Katherine Calf, who made her will in 1389, are a little more informative. The Calfs were a fairly prosperous Bristol family in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Katherine herself was the daughter of John Spicer *alias* Godereste, perhaps predecessors of the Spicer family who flourished in the second half of the fifteenth century and who served as town sheriffs and bailiffs. Katherine appears to have had within the city substantial property over which she had some power of bequest. Some was willed to her husband, while some was to go to her sister and brother-in-law after his death, but she specifically requested that the property left to her by 'Johannis, pater meus, in testamento suo' [John, my father, in his will] should be sold and the money used 'in missis celebrando et aliis elemosinis faciendo' [for the celebration of masses and providing of alms] for the souls of her parents, friends and all the faithful dead, a specification which may indicate that she retained a strong attachment and allegiance to the Spicer family rather than to the family she had married into, this tendency to favour one's blood relatives being evident in a number of

female wills, whether they were made by single, married or widowed women.[67] It is of interest to note that it was the money raised from this property sale that was to be used for pious purposes. It may also be noted that her executors were instructed to see to the proper completion of 'testamentum patris mei et istud, testamentum meum' [the will of my father, and this, my will], which suggests that the property interests and provisions of her will were in part bound up with or dependent on her father's directions and instructions. As for other pious provision, she asked to be buried in the chapel of the Blessed Mary in the church of St. Werburgh, and left money to the poor on the day of her funeral.[68] However, despite obviously having the means, she did not make detailed pious provision, mentioning no charitable institutions, religious houses, guilds or individual members of the priesthood. In this respect, her will may be contrasted with that of her husband's second wife, another Katherine, thrice widowed, whose lengthy will of 1407 made detailed and carefully-thought out pious provision for herself and others.[69]

Margery Wales made her will a year after Katherine Calf, in it describing herself as wife of Master Nicholas Wales, mason, but also as 'filia et heres quondam Magistri Thome Cooke' [daughter and heir of the late Master Thomas Cook], which again suggests that she had a strong sense of identity apart from that bestowed on her by marriage, but from the title she ascribes to her father it can be assumed that he, like her husband, had been a master mason: hence her background was again that of the wealthy or prosperous artisan rather than of the élite. She also mentioned some property, but went into a little more detail as to pious provision, being one of the few married women to leave money to the religious orders of Friars Preachers, Minors and Carmelites. She asked to be buried in the monastic church of St. Augustine, Bristol, leaving the sum of 2s 'in glasco pulsando' [for bell-tolling] there. At first sight this looks interesting as the Augustine canons of Bristol attracted very few bequests from women. (They do not appear to have been particularly

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popular with male testators either, although a higher percentage mentioned them in their wills.[70]) However, this bequest was most likely influenced by her involvement with her husband's life-style and occupation. In his 1402 will, he also left a bequest to the 'belryngers' of the abbey for their prayers and asked to be buried beside Margery. His business links with the canons appear to have been strong, for a Master Nicholas the mason is mentioned in the surviving manor accounts of 1386-7 for Leigh Court, which belonged to the Abbey of St. Augustine's, where he apparently received '2s for coming over to advise and consumed 3 fowls'.[71]

The last will recorded in the Great Orphan Book by a married woman was that of Maud Esterfeld (usually 'Esterfeld', sometimes 'Easterfield' in modern transcriptions) in 1491. It was also the first such female will to be made for over half a century. It may be noted that unlike a number of the married women who had made wills in the period between 1380-1420, she was of élite status, being the second wife of the wealthy merchant, John Esterfeld, twice Mayor of Bristol, by whom she had at least three children, Henry, Isabel and Joan. It also appears that she had another son from a previous marriage. The decision to make a will may have been a demonstration of a particular strong mindedness, being made at a time when this practice seems to have almost ceased as far as married women were concerned. Even so, the will was made 'ex licencia predicti Johannis' [with the licence of the aforesaid John], her husband, and was partly concerned with property that was to go to her son by the Esterfeld marriage—her husband's will later confirming that the property went to whom it was intended— but the will is also revealing of pious preferences and practices on her part. Her husband John was himself a man of considerable devoutness, being named by John Foster, founder of the almshouses at the bottom of St. Michael's Hill, as one of the executors of his will charging him with setting up the venture. Ultimately, Esterfeld donated lands of his own so that the foundation could be completed. There is no

indication that Maud played any part in the scheme; nor does her will reveal any plans for such grandiose projects, but the various gifts she left to churches and chapels reveal a strong devotion to certain female saints and membership of a religious guild particularly favoured by women, both of which are discussed in a later chapter.[72]

In this chapter, I have attempted to discuss briefly the way in which the city of Bristol functioned as a political, social and religious unit in the late medieval period, concentrating particularly on the position and status of women within it, something which, while showing parallels to the experiences of women living in other English cities, also reveals some features perhaps distinct to this particular urban community. In order to do this, I have looked, in the second half of the chapter, at trends in female will-making, and especially at some of the large number of wills made by single and married women in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Such an exercize also allows us an insight into the nature of women's religious expression as it relates to the female life cycle, a theme which reoccurs throughout this study. Of the married women's wills that I have looked at, the most informative, as far as pious provision is concerned, is perhaps that of Maud Esterfeld who appears to have been at least middle-aged when she made it. Thus there is some indication that age as well as marital status may have had an effect on the manifestation of women's piety, allowing the female testator some freedom of pious expression within the sphere of her husband's authority and influence. Generally, however, there is less sense of the independent pious aspiration or expression that can often be found in the wills of widows. It may also be noted that the wills of married women, with the possible exception of Maud Esterfeld, like those of single women, show less evidence of female networking, perhaps indicating that it was not until a woman had attained a more independent status in her life cycle that she was able to build up these networks or felt able to fully acknowledge lifetime friendships. This topic

forms the subject matter of my next chapter, as I feel it had an important part to play in the formation and transmission of female piety.

NOTES

1. On Bristol's population in the late medieval period see J. W. Sherbourne, *The Port of Bristol in the Middle Ages*, (Bristol: Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, 1965), p. 29.

2. Michael Manson, *Bristol beyond the Bridge* (Bristol: Redcliffe Press, 1988), pp. 15-17.

3. Bridgwater, for instance, which was also a port, remained under the control and influence of its two borough lords, the Zouches and the Mortimers, earls of March, while the burgesses of Wells fought constantly over their rights with the bishops of Bath and Wells. In 1341, a charter confirmed their rights and privileges, and granted further ones, but this was cancelled on the grounds that it was prejudicial to the bishop: see Dorothy O. Shelton and Richard Holworthy (eds.), *Wells City Charters*, SRS 46 (1932), p. xiv.

4. N. Dermott Harding (ed.), *Bristol Charters 1155-1373*, BRS 1 (1930), p. 137.

5. On Bristol's trade in the medieval period see Anne Crawford, *Bristol and the Wine Trade* (Bristol: Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, 1984), C. M. MacInnes and W. F. Whittard, *Bristol and its adjoining Counties* (Bristol: Arrowsmith, 1955), pp. 179-82, and Sherbourne, *Port of Bristol*.

6. D. M. Palliser, 'Urban Society', in Rosemary Horrox (ed.), *Fifteenth-Century Attitudes: Perceptions of Society in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 132-49, (p. 140).

7. See further Peter Fleming and Kieran Costello, *Discovering Cabot's Bristol: Life in the Medieval and Tudor Town* (Tiverton: Redcliffe Press, 1998), p. 33.

8. Lists of Bristol's medieval mayors, sheriffs and bailiffs are to be found in Lucy Toulmin Smith (ed.), *The Maire of Bristowe Is Kalendar by Robert Ricart*, Camden Society, New Series V (1872) and F. F. Fox (ed.), *Adams's Chronicle of Bristol* (Bristol: Arrowsmith, 1910). Two other manuscript calendars also contain lists and have been printed in Alfred E. Hudd, 'Two Bristol Calendars', *TBGAS*, 19 (1894-5), pp. 105-41. The dates given in these sources sometimes vary by a year.

9. The wills of Thomas Chedder and his daughter, Isabel Newton, are to be found in Rev. F. W. Weaver (ed.), *Somerset Medieval Wills 1383-1500*, SRS 16 (1901), at pp. 151, and 374-5 respectively.

10. See J. Maclean (ed.), *The Berkeley Manuscripts I and II: The Lives of the Berkeleys by John Smith*, 3 vols (Gloucester: Bellows, 1883), I, pp. 172-3. Mead, in fact, led a contingent of Bristol men on the Berkeley side at the battle of Nibley Green in 1469 between Berkeleys and Lisles. His will is to be found at BRO, Great Orphan Book of Wills, f. 204^r. For Joan Twynyhoo's will, which indicates that she retained an allegiance to various religious institutions within her home town of Bristol, see Weaver, *Somerset Medieval Wills 1383-1500*, pp. 284-5.

11. Angelo Raine, *Mediaeval York* (London and Beccles: Murray, 1955), pp. 103-4, 108-9. See also Tanner, *Church in Late Medieval Norwich*, pp. 96-7, who mentions the fact that East Anglian gentry families such as the Tyes and Erpinhams are known to have had town houses within the city, retaining strong links with it.

12. For female networking in the urban community see Chapter 3 below.

13. T. P. Wadley (ed.), *Notes or Abstracts of the Wills contained in the*

Volume entitled the Great Orphan Book and Book of Wills (Gloucester: Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society, 1886), pp. 57–8.

14. On trade links between Bristol and Coventry see MacInnes and Whittard, *Bristol and its adjoining Counties*, p. 182.

15. Francis Neale (ed.), *William Worcestre: The Topography of Medieval Bristol*, BRS 51 (2000), pp. 257–8.

16. The Chantry Certificates of 1548 give population figures for the Bristol parishes at that time. The parish of St. Thomas was one of the largest, possessing 600 inhabitants, but most of the others were well below this figure. Indeed, some of the central parishes possessed very small populations, All Saints' having 180 and St. Ewen's only 60: see J. Maclean (ed.), 'Chantry Certificates, Gloucestershire', *TBGAS*, 8 (1884–5), pp. 229–308.

17. See John A. F. Thomson, *The Later Lollards* 1414–1520 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 20–51.

18. See, for instance, the wills of Belinus Nansmoen (d. 1416) and Richard Erle (d. 1491) in the Great Orphan Book, respectively ff. 127^{v} and 243^{r}; see also the will of Giles Swayne, PRO, PCC 25 Vox (PROB 11/10), f. 194^{v}.

19. For the chapel of the Assumption of the Blessed Mary see Chapter 6, pp. 207–8 below.

20. BRO, Muniments of the Merchant Tailor's Company, 4954 (3); Burgess, *Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints'*, pp. 136–7.

21. See Chapter 6, pp. 208–9 below.

22. The thirteenth-century 'regula' of the Kalendars' guild can be found in Francis B. Bickley (ed.), *The Little Red Book of Bristol*, 2 vols (Bristol: Croften Hemmings; London: Sotheran, 1900), II, 202–6. For a history of the guild see Nicholas Orme, 'The Guild of Kalendars, Bristol', *TBGAS*, 96 (1978), pp. 32–62.

23. Clive Burgess has noted that Bristol 'never witnessed the evolution of strong religious fraternities', and suggests that this was because 'parishes appear to have satisfied their parishioners' spiritual needs.' He also puts forward the view that 'in the absence either of oppressive religious institutions or an unduly dominating local magnate family, they had little need to articulate or emphasize their social solidarity': see his '"By Quick and by Dead": Wills and Pious Provision', p. 839, n. 7. Most of the information relating to the Bristol guilds can be found in Chapter 6, which looks at the veneration of saints' cults within the city.

24. Burgess, 'Late Medieval Wills and Pious Convention', p. 16.

25. See further C. Phythian-Adams, 'Ceremony and the Citizen', in P. Clark (ed.), *The Early Modern Town* (London: Longman, 1976), pp. 106–28.

26. Meech and Allen, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, pp. 107–8.

27. Toulmin Smith, *Maire of Bristowe Is Kalendar*, pp. 80–1. See also Chapter 6, pp. 213–27 below.

28. For a discussion of the subject as it relates particularly to Bristol see E. W. W. Veale, *Burgage Tenure in Medieval Bristol*, BRS 2 (1931).

29. Barron, 'The "Golden Age" of Women'; Goldberg, *Women, Work, and Life Cycle*. As regards this phenomenon, it should be pointed out that some regional variations can be noted: for instance, while the effects of economic changes favourable to women seem perhaps to have lasted principally between 1380–1420 in Bristol, Caroline Barron's work implies that, for London women, these conditions may have continued throughout the fifteenth century. Jeremy Goldberg's research also appears to indicate that such favourable conditions may have continued at least into the mid-fifteenth century.

30. Judith M. Bennett, 'Medieval Women, Modern Women: Across the Great Divide', in David Aers (ed.), *Culture and History 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 147–75.

31. Sandy Barsley, 'Women's Work Reconsidered: Gender and Wage Differentiation in Late Medieval England', *Past and Present*, 165 (1999), pp.

3-29.

32. M. D. Harris (ed.), *The Coventry Leet Book. Parts I and II,* EETS OS 134 (1907), pp. 545, 568; P. J. P. Goldberg, 'Women', in Horrox, *Fifteenth-Century Attitudes,* p. 131. See also in the same collection Palliser, 'Urban Society', p. 146, who quotes the slightly later example of Chester, where the civic authorities in 1540 passed legislation forbidding women from setting up in brewing on their own.

33. For an account of how Bristol fared during and after the Black Death see Charles Boucher, 'The Black Death in Bristol', *TBGAS,* 60 (1938), pp. 31-46.

34. Bickley, *Little Red Book,* II, 127-8. The king's 'warris' and 'the defence of this his land' may be references either to the wars with France, which the English had occupied in part until 1453, or to the civil disturbances that had occurred in the 1450s and 60s as a result of the rivalry between the houses of Lancaster and York. It is of interest to note that the injunction comes just before one which legislates against 'straungiers' or 'Aliens' being able to work at the craft.

35. See, however, p. 32 above, where it is noted that for a brief period in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries a number of wills were left by women other than those of the élite class.

36. For Alice Chester see Chapters 2, pp. 67-8, 73-6 and 4, pp. 140-1 below; for Maud Baker, whose will is registered PRO, PCC 4 Holgrave (PROB 11/14), ff. 27^{v}-29^{v}, see Chapter 7 below.

37. E. Carus-Wilson (ed.), *The Overseas Trade of Bristol in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Merlin Press, 1966), pp. 227, 233, 258.

38. Great Orphan Book, f. 111^{r}.

39. The wills of Agnes and her husband are registered respectively at PRO, PCC 10 Vox (PROB 11/10), ff. 72^{r-v} and PCC 28 Doggett (PROB 11/9), f. 221^{v}.

40. See pp. 33-49 above.

41. Burgess, *Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints',* pp. 112, 114.

42. Cecily of York and Margaret Beaufort can be cited as two well-known aristocratic women who were noted for their piety in later life, but who, in earlier times, had lived out their lives against a background of political turbulence with the latter in particular playing a significant political role.

43. Burgess, *Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints',* p. 13.

44. It is something of a mystery how Thomas Halleway possessed the same surname as his wife Joan, daughter of Joan and Simon Halleway, although Atchley states in his article on the Halleway chantry cited below, that the name was not uncommon in Bristol at this time. He may have been a distant relative or taken his wife's name on marriage, perhaps testifying to the prestige of the Halleway family.

45. Burgess, *Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints',* p. 15.

46. Documents relating to the setting-up of the chantry are to be found in Strong, *All Saints' City, Bristol Calendar of Deeds,* pp. 34-5, and the 'Compositio' in Bickley, *Little Red Book,* II, 199-206. See also E. G. C. F. Atchley, 'The Halleway Chantry of the Parish Church of All Saints', Bristol', *TBGAS,* 24 (1901), pp. 74-135.

47. Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle,* pp. 266-72.

48. The wills of Elena Barry, Joan Seys and Margaret Gloucester are to be found in the Great Orphan Book, respectively at ff. 55^{r}, 59^{r} and 140^{r}.

49. In York, it appears that there were a large number of unmarried female testators for the period 1418-1442: see Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle,* pp. 269-70. Thus it may be noted that the trend occurred slightly later here than it did in Bristol. As regards Somerset, one possible unmarried testator was Margery Brokworth of Bath (d. 1407), whose will can be found in Weaver, *Somerset Medieval Wills,* p. 32. Its contents indicate that although she was not spectacularly wealthy, she was a woman of fairly substantial

means.
50. See pp. 27-30 above.
51. Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle*, p. 271.
52. Great Orphan Book, f. 106^r.
53. Heather Swanson, *Medieval Artisans: An Urban Class in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 92-4.
54. See Chapter 4, pp. 151-3 below.
55. See, for example, the lengthy will of John Bount in the Great Orphan Book, ff. 94^v-95^r.
56. The relationship between women and the order of Carmelite friars is discussed more fully in Chapter 4, pp. 148-51 below.
57. I have not come across any of these women in other wills, although Alice atte Rode may have been a member of the atte Rode family occasionally mentioned in early-fifteenth-century Bristol town records.
58. See BRO, Muniments of the Merchant Tailor's Company, p. 49 (no original foliation), for Joan Underwode, who made her will 'ex licencia' [with the licence] and 'bona voluntate' [good will] of her husband, 'Dauid Phelippe Underwode, burgensie ville, Bristol'. This document seems curiously truncated, dealing mostly with shops and tenements which, after her husband's death, were to go to 'magistro et guardianis siue custodibus fraternitatis predicte' [the master and guardians or keepers of the said fraternity]. It is possible that only part of the original will, that relating to the guild, was copied into the book.
59. Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle*, pp. 268-9.
60. See Bruce Dilks, *Bridgwater Borough Archives 1377-1399.* In Weaver, *Somerset Medieval Wills 1383-1500,* pp. 108-9, can be found the 1423 will of Agnes Green of Muchelnye, who named her husband as one of her executors, while the same volume, pp. 284-5, records the 1489 will of Joan Twynyhoo of Cayford near Frome, who left a will with the licence of her husband. Joan's will is of interest because she was originally from Bristol, describing herself as the 'daughter of Thomas Rooley, and Margaret, his wife, late of Bristol, "marchaunt"'. Unusually for a married woman, her will went into some detail regarding pious provision, although several times she specified that her wishes were only to be carried out if her husband permitted it; see also n. 10.
61. F. Pollock and F. W. Maitland, *The History of English Law*, 2 vols (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1898), II, 249.
62. Thomson, *Later Lollards*, pp. 20-51.
63. Great Orphan Book, f. 35^r.
64. Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*, pp. 14, 23, 169. Amy Weston's family is unlikely, perhaps, to have been related to the wealthy Weston family mentioned in the will of John Foster in 1492, unless its members had achieved a considerable rise in status over the course of the fifteenth century.
65. Great Orphan Book, f. 105^v.
66. *Ibid.*, f. 128^r. There appears to be no other information available on Margaret and her family, although the surname was not uncommon among the Bristol élite. Sir John Bole was mentioned in a number of other wills, both male and female.
67. This suggests that many women retained a lifelong allegiance to their blood kin rather than to their husband's. Is it possible that such allegiance to one's blood kin stayed particularly strong among élites of urban communities where families remained living in closer proximity to one another, unlike noble or gentry women who could end up living some distance away from their family of birth?
68. Great Orphan Book, f. 25^r. The will of her husband, Henry Calf, dated 1394, is also entered in the book, f. 64^r, and it may be noted that although the document only briefly mentions his first wife, it reveals a particular closeness on his part to her father. He made provision for John Spicer's soul as well as leaving money for 'decimis oblitis' owing by his father-in-law.

69. The period of time that passed between the making of the will and the date of probate appears to differ slightly as regards the wills of married and widowed women, it being evident that a longer timespan elapsed between the two dates in widows' wills. Thus it may have been the case that married women made their wills nearer the point of death, which may explain their relative brevity and lack of detail compared with those of widows.
70. See Chapter 4, pp. 136-41 below.
71. For the wills of Margery and Nicholas see Great Orphan Book, respectively, ff. 58^{r} and 83^{r}. For the reference to Nicholas the mason see Arthur Sabin (ed.), *Some Manorial Accounts of Saint Augustine's Abbey, Bristol*, BRS 22 (1960), p. 9. He is also mentioned more than once in connection with the building of the spire of St. Mary's parish church, Bridgwater, with one entry stating that he had to be specially sent for from Bristol. Thus his advice and skills were obviously much sought after: see Bruce Dilks, *Bridgwater Borough Archives,1200-1377*, p. 64.
72. Great Orphan Book, ff. 258^{v}-259^{r}. Maud's piety is discussed more fully in Chapter 6, pp. 232-3 below. For the details of John Esterfeld's contribution to the foundation of Foster's almshouses see Chapter 5, p. 184 below.

CHAPTER 2

PIETY, DEVOTION AND FEMALE NETWORKING IN THE URBAN COMMUNITY

While marital status may have significantly influenced the way in which female piety manifested itself, I would suggest that other relationships outside of the marital one also played an important part in its formation and transmission, in particular, those relationships and friendships a woman had with the other women of her own family or social grouping. Although there is no evidence that Bristol possessed groups of pious women or sisters dedicated to chastity residing together in the same households as Norman Tanner has found for Norwich, suggesting that they possibly resembled continental beguinages, there are strong indications that women were bound or linked together through pious association and forms of pious activity. I therefore propose in this chapter to look at the whole issue of female networking within the urban community and its influence upon women's lives, particularly in pious and devotional contexts.

The nature of female friendships and relationships between women in medieval society remains an under-researched topic. Furthermore, it has been pointed out that a particular problem in discussing late-medieval friendship as it relates to women is that in the contemporary literature and historical evidence available for studying the subject, friendship is 'an institution unbendingly defined by male preoccupations and ideals.'[1] There are also indications that when relationships and friendships between women were mentioned or discussed in works of both a secular and pious nature, most of which were male-authored, they were viewed in an unfavourable, suspicious or even fearful light. A rather derisive look at female friendship is provided by Chaucer in the Prologue to the Wife of Bath's tale, where the wife states that her 'gossib' Alison 'knew myn herte, and eek my privetee/ Bet than oure parisshe priest.' Furthermore, all the secrets of the wife's fourth husband were

told to her 'and to another worthy wyf/ And to my nece, which that I loved weel'.[2] Thus it is insinuated that women's friendships were characterized by a lack of respect for authority, both secular and religious, with such relationships between women possessing the potential to undermine the marital bond and, thereby, the social fabric of medieval society. Other literary evidence suggests that friendships and close relationships between women may have been seen as inimical to the practice of true piety or to the formation of appropriate or desired forms of pious behaviour. The Knight of La-Tour Landry, expounding to his daughters the tale of St. Martin who rebuked those women who talked of worldly matters while he said mass in church before the congregation, insisted that 'here is an ensample how ye shalle holde you humble and deuote in the chircche, and for no thinge haue no iangelynge with no body while ye are atte the masse, nor while ye serue God.'[3] 'Iangelynge' appears to have been most often associated with women, or rather groups of women, and the fact that the Knight was telling this story to his daughters as a warning not to indulge in the practice appears to reinforce this notion. Moreover, that he implored them not to talk and chatter while they were in a holy place where their thoughts should be concentrated on devotional and spiritual exercizes and activities would further suggest that such irreverent behaviour, thought to be typical of the female sex, was likely to discourage rather than to inspire or reinforce godly behaviour. This theme is echoed in surviving medieval church wall-paintings, such as those at the churches of St. Michael and St. Mary, Melbourne, Derbyshire and Stanford, Northamptonshire, which show women chattering together during church services, while beset or surrounded with devils or monsters.[4] Even friendships and dialogue between women devoted to a religious life may not have been viewed entirely approvingly. Felicity Riddy, writing of such activities and relationships between women, has noted that devout women's talk, 'like women's talk in general, is frequently represented in the rules for

recluses as merely trivial gossip, to be avoided at all costs as an occasion of sin'.[5]

Yet, despite such negative views of female friendship, the wills of widowed women, from which much of the evidence for a study of female networking and friendship comes, suggest that such relationships must have been an integral part of many women's lives, and that, despite the fact that they were denied access to the public sphere, they were able to build up or become part of extensive female networks consisting of kin and other acquaintances. Certainly, studies of widowed women's wills in late medieval London have revealed 'networks of female friendships and loyalties' which may have helped to bring about a certain 'female bonding', and other recent work on the reading habits of noble and gentry women also gives a more positive view of female friendship and networking.[6] Similarly, as regards Bristol, a common characteristic of the majority of widowed women's wills (in contrast, perhaps, to those of single and married women), is the large number of people named as recipients of bequests, particularly other women such as daughters, sisters, women related by marriage ties, friends, helpers, or servants. A close comparison of the wills of the male and female testators registered in the Great Orphan Book reveals that women, or at least, widowed women, named or remembered many more people than men (even though the bequests left by women were often small), with the ratio of female to male recipients being considerably higher. Of course, female testators did not leave exclusively to women and male testators to men, but women were unlikely to leave bequests to men unless they were close relatives, members of the clergy, or, as in a number of cases, both. Male testators, on the whole, appear to have remembered fewer individuals, both male and female, and were much less likely to leave to women other than their wives, daughters or servants. Indeed, from a study of Great Orphan and Great Red Book testators, I have found that the number of men who left bequests to women outside of these two categories

declined considerably throughout the period from 23.5 per cent between 1375-1399 to a mere 5.9 per cent between 1475-1499, which may reveal a change in male perceptions of and attitudes towards women over the course of the fifteenth century. I mention this because it seems to show some correlation with trends that can be traced in the nature of charitable giving by men towards poor women in particular, an issue discussed in more detail in a later chapter.[7]

Naturally, bequests mentioned in testamentary evidence may not reveal all of the friends that a woman had had during her lifetime or the exact nature or closeness of a particular relationship. It must also be admitted that as far as bequests, and particularly pious bequests, are concerned, the wills of urban women are sometimes less precise or informative than those of noble and gentry women. However, with regard to Bristol in particular, wills can be used both separately and in conjunction with other surviving evidence such as late-fifteenth-century benefaction lists and churchwardens' accounts, to build up a picture of the nature of women's networking and its relationship to female pious activity and expression, a process which involves looking at such aspects of female piety as the relationship of women with and their patronage of their parish church. Such evidence suggests that female networks, as well as strengthening bonds between women, also played a significant part in helping to form, transmit and consolidate patterns of religious and devotional behaviour within Bristol in the late medieval period, which I believe in turn provides clues as to the mentalité of urban women and their attitudes to the role or roles allotted to them in a patriarchal society. Furthermore, Bristol makes for a particularly interesting study as far as female networking is concerned, for, despite the comparative lack of a noble or gentry presence in the city for much of the period, by the later fifteenth century there appear to have been at least two prominent groupings of élite women, differentiated by social background, that is, mercantile and gentry, linked with different

religious institutions and communities within the city. This affords some opportunity to compare and contrast the piety of these two female groupings within the urban setting, and by so doing to discern whether and how far the piety of Bristol's wealthiest widows was affected or influenced by that urban insularity which seems to have been a defining characteristic of the outlook of the city's élite in the late medieval period.

Testamentary Bequests: Patterns of Pious Transmission

In their wills, urban women left bequests to children of both sexes, but some distinction can be detected between those left to sons and those left to daughters. Money or ordinary household goods such as pots, basins, spoons and blankets were left to offspring of both sexes, and daughters were naturally left such items as dresses, girdles and hoods. The latter were also often left jewellery and items that appear to have been of perhaps more personal significance or value, such gifts from mothers to daughters often tending to be described in more detail than other bequests. Furthermore, it seems that items of possible religious significance, if not left to religious institutions, were often left by mothers to daughters. Items regularly left included rosaries and, sometimes, crosses or cups with saints' images engraved on them. Isabel Barstaple, whose husband John served as Mayor of Bristol in 1395/6, 1401/2 and 1405/6 and who founded Holy Trinity Hospital with its adjoining chapel at Lafford's Gate, was herself arguably a woman of some piety.[8] Of her five children, two girls and three boys, the eldest, Nicholas, became the first master of the hospital founded by her husband. To him and to his brother Thomas she left money and a number of household items, but to her daughter Alice she left 'vnum broche de auro' [a brooch of gold] worth £3, 'meam optimam zonam harnisatam cum argenteam deauratam cum vno pare de bedys et cruce de argento deaurato' [my best girdle decorated with silver gilt, with a pair of beads and a cross of silver gilt], which, after the latter's death, was to

go to her other daughter Joan.[9] In 1393, Joan Stokes, widow of John, who was Mayor of Bristol in 1364 and 1366, bequeathed various household goods and small gifts to family members and friends, but to Agnes, either her daughter or step-daughter, and wife of William Canynges (grandfather of the more famous William who became a dean at Westbury-on-Trym college in the late fifteenth century), she left 'vnum ciphum argenteum in quo sculpatur ymago Sancti Johannis cum coopertorio eiusdem' [a silver cup on which is engraved the image of St. John, with a cover of the same].[10] The relationship between William Canynges the elder and Joan's husband John, his father-in-law, appears to have been a close one, for he asked to be buried 'iuxta tumulum Johannis Stokes' [next to the tomb of John Stokes][11], and the relationship was perhaps mirrored by that of their two wives. Similarly, later in the century, Agnes Wellishorte (d. 1457) bequeathed to her daughter Agnes Gaywood a number of valuable goods including a standing maser 'cum imagine Sancti Johannis' engraved on the side and a wooden cover lined with silver.[12]

It cannot be known for certain what the donor had in mind when leaving these items and whether they were to be valued because of their material worth or their religious significance, or perhaps both, but it is possible that the testator was intending the object willed to convey a particular spiritual or devotional message, and also that the transmission signified something special about the relationship of the giver to the recipient. Neither Joan Stokes nor Agnes Wellishorte, discussed above, mentioned which St. John was engraved on the objects they bequeathed, but it was most likely St. John the Baptist, one of the most popular saints of the Middle Ages. In Bristol, a number of churches had altars dedicated to him, and offerings to such altars were made fairly frequently in wills.[13] Generally, however, whether this was a feature more characteristic of the piety of urban or even Bristol women, whether it reflected a wider phenomenon of female piety, or whether it had any more relevance to female piety than to male, are moot points and difficult to resolve

conclusively; but it is worthwhile to note the comments of Rebecca Gilchrist and Marilyn Oliva, writing of the seals of female nunneries in East Anglia. They have found that such seals 'frequently depict Christ on the Cross or the Agnus Dei, the nimbed Lamb of God, which often represented the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross', but which 'was also an attribute of St. John the Baptist'. They further argue that these images indicate a strong interest in the Passion and Sacrifice of Christ, 'an interest which informed medieval female piety in the Middle Ages.'[14] The fact that such gifts containing images of the saint were bequeathed by women to women may indicate the importance of St. John and his related attributes to female pious expression, applying as much to the pious and devotional lives of urban laywomen living in the south-west of England as to communities of East Anglian nuns. Certainly, there is evidence of strong Christocentric devotion among other Bristol women later in the century, and it may have been the case that female devotion to St. John the Baptist, a saint who could be associated with the image of the suffering Christ and Christ as the sacrificial lamb, was linked to or another aspect of such Christocentric-based piety.

Sometimes it appears that the child particularly favoured as the recipient of bequests, even when those bequests themselves were not of particular religious significance, was so favoured because of a pious affinity between mother and daughter, such as that between the vowess Maud Baker and her eldest daughter Alice, who became a nun at Shaftesbury.[15] This could also apply to mothers and sons, as in the case of Alice Chester, who left a number of valuable items to her son, head of Barlynch priory in Somerset.[16] However, it appears to have been rarer, at least as regards the Bristol evidence, for women to have left bequests of religious significance to sons, even if they were members of the clergy, a rare instance being that of Agnes Hert, who in her will of 1494, left a cup called a nut, part gilded and 'sculpatum cum imagine Sancti Eustacii' [engraved with the image of St. Eustace], to her son William

rather than to her daughter Agnes.[17]

Turning to look briefly at male wills by way of comparison, it may be noted that sons and daughters were mentioned equally as legatees in the wills of fathers with both receiving money and property, but with daughters usually being the recipients of ordinary household goods or furniture. Sons, unsurprisingly, usually received individual bequests of weaponry and armour,[18] although bequests of religious items or items of possible religious significance left to individuals rather than to the church, are, for some reason, rarely to be found in the wills of Bristol male testators, even where offspring were members of the secular clergy. In 1471, John Gaywood left an interesting bequest to his daughter Isabel of 'vnam tabulam duplicatam de Wayneskott cum quatuor pedibus et vnum beste in eadem' [a folding/portable altar with four feet and a beast in it], and John Esterfeld in 1507 left 'my best cheyne of gold with the crosse thervnto belonging' to his son Henry rather than to his third wife Scholastica or his two daughters, but from these two bequests, it is impossible to conclude whether men were more likely to leave such objects to male or female offspring.[19] Thus, as regards the immediate family, the testamentary evidence relating to pious bequests or bequests of objects with pious associations hints at the possibility that patterns of piety and/or the transmission of pious characteristics may be easier to trace through the mother/daughter relationship than any other.

Turning to the wider circle of female kin and acquaintances, apart from daughters and granddaughters, it is evident that female testators left bequests to a variety of other women. In these cases, the relationship between testator and recipient is not always clear, that is, whether they were blood kin, related by marriage, friends and acquaintances who moved in the same social circles, servants and other women merely living or lodging in the testator's household, or, as was often the case, women who could be placed into more than one of these categories. These gifts and bequests were often household goods or

items of clothing, but could be of a more personal nature. Sometimes it was stated that the woman receiving the gift was to pray for the soul of the giver, but this was not always made clear. Again, bequests of religious items or items with religious significance were usually left to female rather than to male acquaintances. Isabel Barstaple, as well as leaving a cross to her daughter, left to Alice Castell (whose relationship to her was not specified) 'vnam nigram seynt' decorated with silver and gilt.[20] In 1419, Agnes Gorges left to Marion Blak a number of household items, but also 'a pair of jet beads with guildes...of silver gilt', 'a gold ring engraved with Jesu' and a 'silver cup and cover engraved with this band "Jesus est amor meus"'; and later in the century Alice Chester, one of a group of wealthy benefactresses who patronized All Saints' church, left to the unusually-named Fredeswide Dalanier a number of gifts including 'vnum owch cum vno agne in media parte' [a brooch with a lamb in the middle], perhaps again, linked to the idea and intended to remind the recipient of Christ as the sacrificial lamb.[21] The bequest may also be an indication of the Christocentric devotion that seems to have been so important a feature of Alice's piety. Again, comparing female wills with those of men, it seems that generally, outside of the immediate family, male testators mentioned fewer individuals than women, and when they did the legatees were usually men who, as was the case with sons, were left bequests of horses, weaponry or armour, with bequests of religious items, such as that left by Thomas Elyot to Thomas Hoskyns in 1505 of a 'crucifix of golde', being extremely rare.[22] Male testators tended to prefer to leave such items to parish churches, or occasionally institutions of male religious. It is notable, however, that a few men did bequeath books of a religious nature to other men, usually to members of the secular clergy, suggesting that there existed small circles of clergy and laymen with a considerable interest in matters of a religious or theological nature, although this is discussed at greater length in a later chapter.[23] There are a few instances of male testators bequeathing service

books or books of a liturgical nature to male relatives among the laity. In 1434, for example, Nicholas Excestre, who had four sons and a daughter living at his death, left to his son John 'meum optimum missale' [my best missal], and John Esterfeld, mentioned above, father of three sons and two daughters, in his 1504 will left his 'psalterboke and a matens boke' to his son Henry and to his younger son John the 'best matens boke', covered with velvet.[24] Studies of women's reading material in the Middle Ages suggest that book ownership or bequests of books were generally much rarer amongst urban women than amongst noble or gentry women; as it appears that 'religion was by far the dominant reading interest of medieval women' which might therefore offer further insight into female pious tastes and the transmission of female pious concerns, the lack of such bequests is to be regretted.[25] Bristol seems to follow this general trend, for, as far as I have been able to tell, there are no bequests of books or literary material left by mothers to daughters or to wider female kin or friends. The few books seemingly owned or left by women, mostly dating from after 1450, were again mostly service or liturgical volumes which were usually left to the parish church.[26]

Overall, the testamentary evidence is useful as it reveals much about patterns of pious transmission between women, but it can also be used in conjunction with other evidence to be found in parish archives and church books to uncover more about networks between women. This primarily involves the study of women as benefactresses to the parish church, a role which a number of wealthy fifteenth-century Bristol widows undertook with some enthusiasm. Although the role of the medieval parish church as the embodiment and focus of corporate piety in the urban community has not been a neglected topic, the part played specifically by women in its maintenance and patronage has not been studied in any detail. As the Bristol evidence affords considerable opportunity for a study of this kind, it has been examined in some depth in the following section.

The Role of Women as Benefactresses to the Parish Church: Female Networks and the Creation of Space

There is no doubt that urban people in general, particularly those of the urban élite, showed a considerable attachment to their parish church or to various of the parish churches within their community, more so perhaps than members of the nobility and gentry, who did not always live in as close proximity to such institutions, and who, as the fifteenth century wore on, showed an increasing tendency to prefer to worship in private chapels within their household. Norman Tanner, looking at the testamentary evidence for Norwich between 1370-1532, has found that 'more testators gave to the parish churches than anything else',[27] and a study of the wills in the Great Orphan and Great Red Books reveals that the same can be said of Bristol, where the percentage of lay people leaving such bequests rose over the period, with the rise for some reason being more pronounced among women than among men. Just over half of the women testators left bequests in the early part of the fifteenth century compared to 70-80 per cent of men, although by the second half of the century practically all testators, male and female, left a bequest to their parish church and/or other local churches, clearly reflecting the countrywide phenomenon of parishioners' growing interest in the adornment of their parish churches. Most of the bequests in wills were small, usually a sum of money to the church fabric, but increasingly, as the fifteenth century wore on, they included cups, chalices, altar cloths and vestments.

Apart from wills, the few transcripts of the records of St. Nicholas's church made by Cuthbert Atchley earlier this century reveal that parishioners were active as benefactors in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, although they appear to have been somewhat less lavish in their gifts than those whose names can be found in late-fifteenth-century benefaction lists, church inventories and churchwardens' accounts. This may, however, merely be reflecting the nature or bias of Atchley's selection. Unfortunately, in the 1394 inventory, the names of the donors are rarely recorded. The short

inventory book belonging to St. Mary Redcliffe contains the names of benefactors to that church pre-1470, although, for the most part, the gifts donated or bequeathed and the names of the benefactors are listed in separate sections so that it is not always possible to know who donated what items. Furthermore, no dates are given, although some, such as 'Henrici Gyldeney et Margarete, vxoris eius' can be identified as members of the early-fifteenth-century élite.[28] A number of the laity, usually wealthy merchants such as John Stokes and Edmund Blanket, chose to found perpetual chantries in their parish church in the fourteenth century when this form of foundation was at its height both in Bristol and elsewhere, leaving expensive vestments, vessels and books for carrying out specified services within the church, clearly expecting that parishioners would join in or attend them.[29] Thus, chantries can also be seen as a form of church patronage. Few perpetual chantries were founded solely by women in the period when such foundations were popular, perhaps because most lacked the necessary resources for this type of long-term endowment.

It was the second half of the fifteenth century that saw considerable growth in the embellishment of parish churches, both of the exterior and interior, and it is from this period that most of the evidence relating to such activities by laymen and women dates. Well-known Bristol benefactors include the wealthy merchant, John Shipward the younger, who commissioned the building of St. Stephen's tower in the later fifteenth century, and William Canynges (1404-1474), whose additions to St. Mary Redcliffe led to him being described as 'renovator et quasi alter fundator ac inter ceteres specialissimus benefactor ecclesie de Redeclif' [a restorer and, as it were, another founder, and among others, a very special benefactor of the church of Redcliffe].[30] Most of our information about benefactions to parish churches comes from three central parishes, those of All Saints', St. Ewen's and St. John's. As much less survives from other parishes, whether these three were entirely unusual or

atypical, or whether the parishioners or benefactors of these churches were more liberal or generous than those of other parishes, is difficult to know with certainty, but it is noteworthy that a large number of the town élite in the second half of the fifteenth century, that is, members of such families as the Bakers, Battens, Chesters, Parnaunts, Rowleys, Sharps, Snygges and Woddingtons, appear to have patronized one or more of these three churches, which suggests that the pious aspirations of the city's most prominent mercantile families may have been focused here. However, it is important to point out that a number of them also lived in these parishes, as wills and deeds make clear.

Benefaction lists, particularly that of All Saints', show that many of the women of these families, almost exclusively widows, lavished much money, care and attention on the decorating, furnishing, and in Alice Chester's case, commissioning of building work (including a screen with twenty-two images of saints and an altar front also with representations of saints) within the interior of these churches. The name of Alice Chester, one of Bristol's most generous benefactresses to both secular and religious projects, is one that crops up with a certain regularity in this study of laywomen's piety in late medieval Bristol, partly because the amount of evidence relating to her life and pious activity is fairly extensive. Her birth date is not known, although her will made in 1485, the year of her death, reveals that by then, she had two grown-up sons. Her husband Henry had been a wealthy draper who served as sheriff in 1470, dying in the same year, and most of the evidence relating to Alice's activites, both secular and religious, dates from the time of her husband's death. As a widow, it is clear that she engaged in overseas trading ventures to the Low Countries, Portugal and Spain, and that in her native city she was involved in a number of grand building schemes and commissions, one of these being the construction of a new house in the High Street in 1472, to include on the ground floor a 'shop', which suggests that she was not only

carrying on but even expanding her husband's business after his death. There was also to be a 'hall' above the shop with 'an oryell', 'a chamber above the hall with an oryell, and another chambre above that'.[31] She appears to have had a strong sense of civic duty and a loyalty to the mercantile community, as she caused to be made for the grand sum of £41 'a crane upon the Back by the Marsh Gate' at 'her own costs and charges' for 'the common weal of this town and for the saving of merchants' goods, both of the town and of strangers, the tenth year before her death'.[32]

However, it was her role as pious benefactress to the churches of All Saints and St. Ewen, particularly the former, which marked her out as a woman of some munificence.[33] She was one of a like-minded group of wealthy élite widows whose pious affections were, in part, lavished on All Saints' church, and I would like to examine in more detail the role played by these women as benefactresses to the parish. It has been noted by Clive Burgess, in his edition of the All Saints' church book, 'how important a role widows might play as benefactresses to the parish' and further 'that they played this role usually after their husband's and before their own death', but he also suggests that this 'has evaded historians' scrutiny.'[34] It is this issue that I would like to address in the following pages. Although many of the urban lay male élite of the late fifteenth century are known to have served as churchwardens of All Saints', they tend to figure in the benefaction list in a relatively minor way. According to this, the most prodigious benefactors were the widows of these men, along with individual vicars of the church of All Saints, such as Sir Maurice Hardwick, who assumed that position in 1455, and clerical members of the Kalendars' guild, which met in the same church and which included such men as Henry Gillard, Prior of the guild, who died in 1451.[35] It is possible that some of the benefactions and occasional elaborate building plans commissioned by these women were planned by husband and wife, (having been discussed by the couple) before the husband's death with the verbal agreement

Fig. 1

Above: All Saints' Church, Corn Street

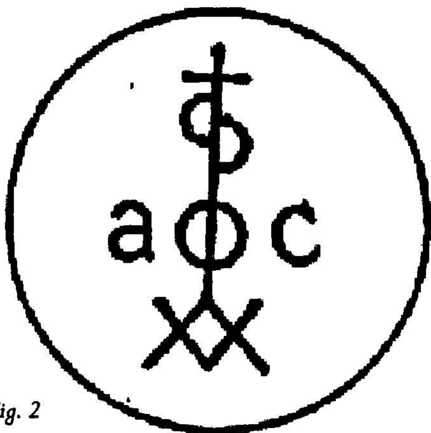


Fig. 2

Left: Merchant mark of Alice Chester. Reproduced from Alfred Hudd, 'Bristol Merchant Marks', *Proceedings of the Clifton Antiquarian Club*, VII (1912), p. 153

that the widow was to provide these things out of the residue of goods left to her.[36] However, if a particular gift was intended as conveying the dead husband's wishes as well as those of his widow, this is perhaps indicated in the benefaction list, as in the case of Alice Chester, who is referred to as 'executrix to the said Harry' before some benefactions, but not in others, which may demonstrate that the impetus for some of the gifts came from him.[37] There is often an indication as to when gifts were donated jointly, by the husband alone, or by the widow, as it is emphasized in a number of instances that the gifts were given by the latter 'at her own cost' or 'of her own devotion'. Furthermore, if the donations were to be given entirely or in part on behalf of the husband's last wishes, it seems most likely that his widow would have carried out the enterprise soon after his demise. Yet it is very clear, especially where the woman remained a widow for many years after her husband's death, that the items were donated and received at different periods of time, often some while after the husband's death and before her own. This last point also serves to show that these gifts were not just testamentary bequests, and in the case of Maud Baker it was specifically stated that she acted as benefactress 'during her life and after her decease'.[38] An examination of the wills of both Alice Chester and Maud Baker also reveals that many of these gifts must have been bequeathed some time before their deaths as they were not mentioned in these two documents. If bequests were specifically left by will, the book often indicates this, as in the case of John and Agnes Steyner, husband and wife, who were recorded as having left certain goods 'by testament' and 'according to their wills.'[39]

The fact that many women were recorded as generous benefactors, and their gifts described in detail, reveals, I believe, interesting features about the nature of laywomen's piety in this particular urban community, and perhaps within late-medieval urban communities in general. Examining the relationships and links between these women and, in some cases, similarities which can be

detected in the nature of their pious aspirations and inclinations, allows us another window through which to view female networking, shedding light on the possible formation and transmission of pious attitudes and characteristics between women, which in turn provides clues as to the attitude of the late-medieval urban woman regarding the place allocated to her and to her sex in medieval society.

Many widows were recorded as donating small sums of money, but others, perhaps on account of their greater wealth, were more generous. Katherine Leynell, wife of John, a wealthy draper who died in 1474, had arranged with him 'to find a priest to sing in this church 10 years to the worship of almighty God and augmenting of divine service'. They also donated 'a mass book p'c~10 marks' and 'a great pair of latten candlesticks, called standards, for the choir, where before we had but 2, now we have 4'; but Katherine added considerably to these donations after her husband's death. Like a number of other widows, she added to the joint temporary foundation by founding 'of her own devotion by her days and at her own proper cost... a priest to sing in this church in addition to the 10 years before rehearsed that she was bound unto, that is to say 2 years'. The book also states that 'where our second suit of vestments were of bawdkin and nothing of fineness unto the best suit, the said Katherine, considering this, ordained and has given to the honour of almighty God and of All Hallows unto this church a finer suit of blue velvet with flowers, otherwise branches, of gold with orfreys of red velvet and eagles of gold, that is to say a chasuble, 2 tunicles with their albs and amices and their apparels and 2 copes according to the same, and it cost £25'.[40] Katherine's husband, John, served as churchwarden on a number of occasions with the husbands of other subsequent widows like Maud Baker and Alice Chester. As the latter's husband was also a draper, it is likely that the two women knew one another closely, and it may also be noted that John Leynell's will contains a small money bequest to a servant of Alice Chester.[41]

Both Joan Wiltshire *alias* Batten and Alice Snygge can be more positively identified as having connections with other widows of the town élite. Joan was the second wife of Clement Wiltshire, churchwarden of All Saints' and Mayor of Bristol in 1492, dying in office in the same year. He was described as 'a well willing man and a loving unto the church and to the parish' and was recorded as leaving 20s to the church and founding a chantry within it for three years. This was mentioned in his will, which document also reveals that he left 'vnam togam de scarlett' to John Thomas, vicar of the church, to pray for his soul and that of his family.[42] Joan's will is not extant, but she was recorded as having made a number of benefactions after her husband's 'departing of this world' including 'a pair of vestments of blue satin with flowers? embroidered of gold-28s 4d', also 'a pagent with a rose in the bottom gilded, with 6 candlesticks of latten, price 26s 8d, and '4 fine altar clothes of diaper'.[43] A John Batten, most likely Joan's brother or brother-in-law, served as mayor in 1501, and was mentioned as a 'feofee' and an executor in the will of Maud Baker, who is discussed in more detail below, so it would appear likely that the two women knew one another.[44]

John Snygge, who served as town sheriff in 1486/7 and died in 1490, gave '£5 in money' and 'found a priest to sing in the church by the space of 3 years'; while his wife Alice 'gave a pair of vestments, p'c 16s', 'a pair of latten candlesticks', 'a good censer of silver, p'c £8', and to 'All Hallows' conduit-40s' (this last being noteworthy, as it provides a rare instance of a Bristol woman donating to the outside fabric of the church).[45] Two property deeds, dated 1476, indicate Alice Chester's personal involvement with the Snygge family, one recording property made over by Alice and her son John to 'William Spencer John Snygge and others', the other concerning the 'various pious and charitable uses to be performed by the said Willm. Spencer, John Snygge and others respecting the property comprized in the last Grant'.[46] John Snygge along with Thomas Snygge, sons of the above John and Alice,

were also both mentioned in Maud Baker's will as feoffees and executors, so again Alice Snygge was clearly a familiar acquaintance of Maud.[47] Two other women who donated smaller items can be positively identified as being related to Maud Baker and Alice Chester, perhaps indicating a tradition of pious female networking and activity centred on All Saints' church. Maud Woddington, Maud Baker's mother, was recorded as leaving 'a good and fine towel of *twilly*', while Alice's daughter-in-law, Anne Hervey, formerly Chester, gave a tenement along with her husband Humfrey and, as a widow, '3 altar cloths', although whether these were bequeathed by testament rather than during her lifetime is uncertain.[48]

Alice Chester and Maud Baker are discussed further and individually in later chapters, but there are some elements of their piety that can be most profitably discussed in the context of female urban networks and the role of women as benefactresses to the church. The two women died eighteen years apart, Alice in 1485, having been widowed for fifteen years, and Maud in 1504, having been widowed for ten, so there was probably an age gap between them of some years. There is, however, some evidence to suggest that they knew one another, and that, although Maud was still married during the years of Alice's widowhood, she was influenced by the older woman when herself a widow. Maud's husband, Thomas Baker, was named as one of the two executors in the will of John Chester, Alice's son, who died in 1488, and to whom she appears to have had a close attachment, but apart from family and social links to be found in the testamentary evidence; a number of similarities can be detected in the pious preferences and inclinations of the two women, indicating some form of shared religious experience. It may be noted that both had a child in religious orders, in Alice's case a son who became the head of Barlynch Priory in Somerset, and in Maud's a daughter who entered the prestigious nunnery at Shaftesbury in Dorset. As very few of the sons and daughters of late-medieval Bristolians appear to have joined religious orders,

this is of particular note.[49] Both widows spent many years beautifying the parish church, and it is these furnishings, devotional aids and works of religious art that are of interest when comparing the piety of the two women. Devotion to the cult of saints appears to have been a distinctive element of Alice's piety, while Maud showed an interest only in a few saints, but it is striking that both showed a preference for St. Christopher. He was mentioned as one of the three principal saintly figures for Alice's grand enterprise of the building of the new rood loft, while Maud commissioned 'an image of Saint Christopher that cost her-30s' to be painted on to one of the '2 pillars of the lower part of the church'. [50] Despite being one of the most popular saints of the Middle Ages, I have found no references to him in the wills of Bristol testators. No church or chapel in the city was dedicated to him, and none appear to have housed his image, apart from All Saints', where the benefaction list mentions the books that were kept in 'the grate at St. Christopher's foot.'[51] It is possible that the saint may have held personal significance for Alice and Maud, although there is nothing to specifically indicate the precise nature of either woman's draw to his cult. His role as the patron saint of travellers may have struck a chord with them, as they were both the wives of merchants, with Alice, in particular, participating in a number of trading ventures in her widowhood. Whatever the case, their veneration perhaps suggests a shared pious outlook.

There was too the apparent Christocentric devotion shared by the two widows, a number of the items given by them to adorn and decorate the interior of the church depicting scenes from the life of Christ. Alice donated a cloth to hang over a new altar front 'of the passion of Our Lord...to be drawn at certain times after the pleasure of the vicar and the parishioners'; and 'to Our Lady altar 2 stained clothes for the over part and for the nether, where in the over cloth is a picture of Our Lord rising out of the sepulcre.'[52] Maud Baker, sometime before her death, commissioned a painting on one of the

pillars of the church over the font 'of the baptising of our Lord Jesus Christ.' She also donated 'a table of the Transfiguration of Our Lord Jesus Christ' specifically 'to move and excite people to devotion', testifying to her own probable devotion to the feast of the Transfiguration, which grew in popularity in the fifteenth century and was given official sanction in 1487.[53] All these items taken together hint at the reverence of the two widows for the cult of the Holy Name of Jesus, which attained its own feast in 1494. Devotion to the cult and the growth in altars dedicated to the Mass of Jesus were a countrywide phenomenon in the later fifteenth century, but the surviving evidence of All Saints' suggests that the widows Baker and Chester were two of its most fervent adherents. The Chesters appear to have led the way in founding a Mass of Jesus in All Saints' church, the church book recording that 'in the worship of Jesus, to the foundation of a mass of Jesus by note to be kept and continued every Friday in this church and likewise an anthem, the said Harry and Alice have given to this church a tenement in Broad Street.'[54] The exact date of the foundation is uncertain, although it must have been some time before Henry Chester's death in 1470. It has been argued that 'the Mass of Jesus was... emphatically an observance seized on by élites in every community as a convenient expression, and perhaps, an instrument of their social dominance', a factor which may partially have lain behind the support the Mass received from the wealthy benefactors of All Saints' church. However, the cult of the Holy Name also stressed the believer's personal attachment to Jesus, to his Passion and suffering and 'the sweetness, gentleness and accessibility of the human saviour'.[55] It was such an affinity with the suffering Christ that had been so important to Margery Kempe and her brand of affective piety earlier in the century. When, in one of her visions, she saw Christ hanging on the cross 'alto-rent & toryn with scorgys' and 'þe reuerys of blood flowing owt plentevowsly of euery membre', this caused her to fall down and weep loudly

'for þe fyer of lofe þat brent so feruently in hir sowle wyth pur pyte and compassyon.'[56] Similarly, in the more theologically conceived treatise of Julian of Norwich entitled *The Revelations of Divine Love*, Julian's empathy and identification with the suffering Christ are frequently portrayed in vivid terms.[57] It is difficult to gauge the depth or exact nature of the two women's devotion, but it may well have been this aspect of the cult of the Holy Name that held the greatest appeal for them. It has been suggested that the later fifteenth-century Christocentric devotions stressed a move 'from the physical nature of the Passion towards a more mental, perhaps truly spiritual appreciation of Christ.'[58] Nevertheless, devotion to the physical sufferings of Christ, a characteristic feature of late medieval piety, had always held a particular significance for especially pious women and the devotion of the two widows to the Mass of Jesus was particularly stressed in the benefaction list. Also, in her will of 1485, Alice left two torches to All Saints' church, but a further two to the 'altari Beate Marie eiusdem ecclesie pro seruicio Jesus ibidem' [to the altar of the Blessed Mary in that church for the performance of the Jesus service there].[59] Maud was particularly concerned that her executors 'of my goodys fynde or doo to be fownde iij tapers of wex euery taper therof weyng a pownde for to be set vp and bren by for the blessyd image of Iesus within the sayd paryshe church of Alhalows durying the lyfis of my executores vnderwriten.'[60]

It is a pity that so little information survives about the guild of Jesus founded in the same church towards the end of the fifteenth century, probably, as Clive Burgess suggests, stimulated by the foundation of the Jesus Mass.[61] The two widows may have been members, but the surviving evidence for the guild is extremely sparse and does not include a membership list. This development in late medieval religion, that is, the growth in devotion to the cult of the Holy Name of Jesus, which, it can be argued, had particularly strong associations with female piety, was one which Maud Baker and Alice

Chester shared with other social classes of women, including prominent noblewomen like Cecily of York and Lady Margaret Beaufort whose devotion to Christ, 'apparent in all her benefactions, in her attention to the cult of the Holy Name, and in her reverence for the eucharist' was an essential component of her piety.[62] Thus it may be noted that, although the wealthy urban widows discussed here appear to have had little or no contact with individual or groups of noble and gentry women, they were equally affected by developments that occurred in fifteenth-century religious and devotional life.[63] How far the cult attracted other devotees and how many other churches in Bristol had altars dedicated to the Mass of Jesus is uncertain. The will of William Myryfeld of the parish of St. Thomas the Martyr, dated 1464, left various legacies to religious guilds including 3s 4d to 'the Fraternity of the Mass of Jesus', but failed to say which church or chapel it was attached to, and John Shipward in his 1471 will left money for a chaplain to say 'missam in honore beatissimus nominis Ihesus quolibet die veneris septimanam' [mass in honour of the most blessed Name of Jesus on every Friday in the week] in St. Stephen's church.[64] However, no other testator of that parish whose will is recorded in the Great Orphan Book mentioned it, nor was any reference made to an altar dedicated to the Mass of Jesus in the 1494 inventory book, although a number of other saints' altars were mentioned.

I would like to end this section on the widows of All Saints' parish by looking at the possible significance of their role as benefactresses to the church with regard to female networking and the whole issue of women's place in medieval society. Pamela Graves, writing about social space in the late medieval English parish church, has written of 'the vast amount of rebuilding' carried out by 'profit-making merchants, lawyers, guilds and civic authorities who were pouring money into extensive rebuilding of urban churches, and in effect, creating space'.[65] To an extent, this idea of the formation and creation of space can be applied to the widows' patronage of All Saints' church. These

women were linked by social ties and kinship, but the role played by each one as a benefactress suggests a shared female religious experience, which also led to the creation of space within the interior of the church building. Indeed, this notion can be linked to the 'concept of gendered space' in the medieval period, an issue that has recently been raised by Barbara Hanawalt, who has argued that 'by limiting the physical spaces that women could occupy and controlling women within that space and outside of it, medieval men defined a spatial location for women that made women who moved beyond those boundaries more clearly marginal', and suggests that most women therefore spent 'the larger part of their lives within prescribed spaces.' She notes that in the urban environment it was perhaps more difficult to define and separate women's space, although even here 'women still moved within a narrower confine' and that for 'upper class women, those married to the merchant élite, home would be the center of their lives.'[66] Although some of the women under discussion here remained partially active in their husband's trade or business after his death, and were not, as widows, perhaps so closely confined as Graves suggests, I would argue that through their pious and munificent gift-giving to the church of All Saints, they showed some awareness of the limits of the space that they moved in and the prescribed or set boundaries and constructs that dictated their lives and position in the world, a position which was all too frequently one of marginality, obscurity or even invisibility. Their pious aspirations, which found an outlet in the decorating, furnishing, and embellishing of walls and altars within the parish church of All Saints, allowed them to stamp a distinguishing mark on its interior which, in the case of Alice Chester and Maud Baker in particular, displayed some features common to female religious experience. Although this was doubtless part of a desire on their part that they and their families should be remembered by other members of the parish and the urban communities, it may also have reflected a further desire or need to attain a greater visibility by creating a separate female space,

separate, that is, from that which had been constructed for or allotted to them by patriarchal society, and a space, furthermore, defined and fashioned by their own pious tastes. This is of particular importance when it is remembered that within parish churches women were allotted different seating areas and thus a separate space from men, a practice inherited from the early church.[67] It is important to note that this was not space that they had created for themselves. Yet, the activity of the All Saints' widows in beautifying their church demonstrates that it was possible for women to create their own space there, despite or even because of the restrictions based on their movement within the building.

It is also suggested that these women created 'space' on the bede role, the written record of their pious acts and donations. The list was no doubt compiled for a number of reasons, including, as Clive Burgess has argued, to 'stimulate participation' on the part of the parishioners 'where fines and financial determinants may have fallen short'.[68] However, it also indicates a particular desire by those who patronized the church, the 'good doers', to have their names and gifts written down and read out the Sunday before Ash Wednesday so that 'they shall not be forgotten but be had in remembrance and be prayed for of all this parish that be now and all of them that be to come'.[69] Does this therefore indicate an awareness on the part of widows like Alice Chester and Maud Baker not only of the creation of a new social space by them, but also a desire to ensure its greater permanence by way of the written instrument, so finding a place in the memory and consciousness of succeeding generations of parishioners? It may be significant that benefactresses like Alice Chester, Maud Baker and the other wealthy women with whom they were connected concentrated their efforts on the interior of the building, while wealthy merchants, such as John Shipward and William Canynges, who were also generous patrons to their parish churches, often concerned themselves with the embellishment of the building's exterior. This difference cannot have

existed purely because these men had greater wealth and means to pursue expensive building projects, for, as mentioned above, Alice herself commissioned a huge screen with twenty-two saintly images upon it within All Saints': so did it partly reflect the expectation that women should conduct their business and live their lives principally within the confines of a particular building or institition, usually the home or household, rather than outside it, thereby avoiding or being prevented from entering into any of the more public spaces or domains traditionally occupied by men? However, even if it was ultimately circumscribed by the spatial and mental limitations placed upon women's movement by a patriarchal society, I would advance the argument that the creation of a female space of physical, religious and social dimensions by women acting as benefactresses to the parish church was a distinct feature or manifestation of strong female networking, and a testament to its strength.

A Network of Gentry Women within the Urban Community

So far, the information relating to female relationships and women's pious networks has been confined to women who were, for the most part, members of the mercantile community. These women do not appear to have included women of noble or gentry origin from outside of the city among their close friends or acquaintances, either within the local proximity or further afield, thereby perhaps reflecting that general inwardness of outlook that appears to have characterized Bristol's mercantile community in the late medieval period. Maud Baker was a possible exception in counting the Abbess of Shaftesbury among her friends, although most of her numerous kin and associates appear to have belonged to the urban élite circles that she moved in and amongst.[70] Bristol may have been unusual in this respect, for interaction and integration between women of gentry and mercantile backgrounds in other urban communities was, perhaps, more common, as recent research done on London

widows has shown, though it should be taken into account that London, as the capital, may have been a little atypical.[71]

There was, however, by the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, a network or tradition of widowed women from related gentry families (not all of whom came from the local vicinity) linked with the city, and who had particularly strong connections with one of Bristol's largest religious and charitable institutions, St. Mark's Hospital. The hospital, otherwise known as the Gaunts of Billeswick, was sited less than a quarter of a mile to the west of the central parishes, facing onto the area of the present-day College Green. Its grounds and out-buildings, commemorated in some of the modern-day street names near or behind the surviving chapel, covered a wide expanse. As far as the urban community was concerned, it appears to have been a respected institution, but somewhat distanced from the lives and concerns of the mercantile community in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. A study of the testators in the Great Orphan and Great Red Books reveals that St. Mark's was rarely singled out as a recipient for bequests, either in its role as a charitable institution or as a religious community, and it certainly does not appear to have attracted the interest of pious women from among the urban élite. It can even be argued that, by the second half of the fifteenth century, the western part of the town, although containing two large religious institutions, St. Mark's and the abbey of St. Augustine, was somewhat isolated from the main urban community, playing little part in the religious life of its inhabitants. It may be tentatively suggested therefore that by the fifteenth century, there existed a religious east-west topographical divide which influenced the pious concerns of Bristol's inhabitants, with the 'dividing line' lying just beyond the western banks of the river where two of the friaries were sited. The area to the east contained the parish churches patronized by Bristol's wealthier inhabitants, and the friaries which were also popular with the townsfolk, while the west contained the abbey of St. Augustine and the

Hospital of St. Mark, two institutions which occasionally attracted the attention of the few gentry families having links with Bristol. Perhaps reflecting this trend, the pious, late-fifteenth-century widows of the urban élite discussed above and the gentry women connected with St. Mark's do not seem to have known or associated with each other, but I would like to end the chapter by looking in more detail at the latter, as I believe links can be made and similarities detected between both groups as regards patterns of women's networking and the nature of female piety.

At first sight the hospital, being a male community, would not appear to have been an obvious choice for attracting the interest or patronage of pious women. Initially it had been an almonry founded at Billeswick by Maurice de Gaunt, cousin of Thomas, Lord Berkeley, sometime between 1216-1230, under the control of St. Augustine's Abbey, but his nephew, Robert de Gournay, later freed it from the abbey's control and transformed it into a full religious house, with a master and brethren subject to the Augustinian Rule. Its primary function was an elemosynary one, namely, the feeding of a hundred men daily, rather than one concerned with caring for the sick. However, as the fifteenth century wore on, the number of people leaving alms dwindled, and when it was suppressed in 1539 it seems to have been classed as a religious house rather than a hospital.[72] For some time into the fourteenth century, the institution with its adjoining chapel continued to attract the interest of cadet branches of the Berkeley family, some of whom were buried here. Yet it is clearly evident that by the later fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, other women of gentry families had formed a strong attachment to the hospital, even residing within its precincts. Possibly, the hospital came to gain a reputation as a place of sojourn, sanctuary or retirement for high-born ladies.[73] In particular, by the late fifteenth century, women connected with both the Shropshire family of Cornwall or Cornwell and the Guildfords of Kent are known to have had links with the hospital.[74]

The will of Elizabeth Cornwell, dated 1489, is of particular interest as it reveals much about her piety, her close association with St. Mark's, and her kin and friendship networks. Elizabeth was one of the daughters of Sir Roland Lenthall, favourite of Henry IV and builder of Hampton Court, Herefordshire, and Lucy Grey, daughter of Lord Grey of Codnor. She married Thomas Cornwell, sixth Baron of Burford, Salop (now Shropshire), less than a quarter of a mile from the Worcestershire border. The Cornwells were reputedly descended from an illegitimate line of Richard of Cornwall, son of King John, and their sphere of influence lay around the area where the present-day borders of the two counties of Shropshire and Hereford and Worcester meet. Elizabeth's married life may not have been an easy one, for her husband was attainted by Edward IV because of his support for the Lancastrian cause. His estates were seized and he was imprisoned for some time in Ludlow Castle, before being finally pardoned in 1467 and dying in 1472, seventeen years before Elizabeth.[75] His widow's difficult situation may have been compounded by the activities of his sister Eleanor and the family of her second husband, Richard Croft, who were granted the confiscated property, although it was eventually regained by Elizabeth's grandson. The Crofts, a minor family of the Herefordshire gentry, can certainly be described as ambitious and ruthlessly motivated, as well as perhaps grasping, but they nevertheless prospered under both the Yorkists and Henry VII.[76] Relationships between Cornwells and Crofts do not appear to have been smooth, and indeed, it has been questioned how far Croft was helping his brother-in-law by managing the forfeited property for him, or how far he was exploiting it for his own ends.[77] How all these events affected Elizabeth and where she was living throughout is unclear, as is the start of her connection with Bristol, although an entry in the Patent Rolls, dated 1486, mentions a grant 'for life to Elizabeth Cornewaille, widow, of a tun of wine yearly, out of the king's prises in the port of Bristol.'[78] However, her link with Bristol may have gone back a long way, perhaps as a

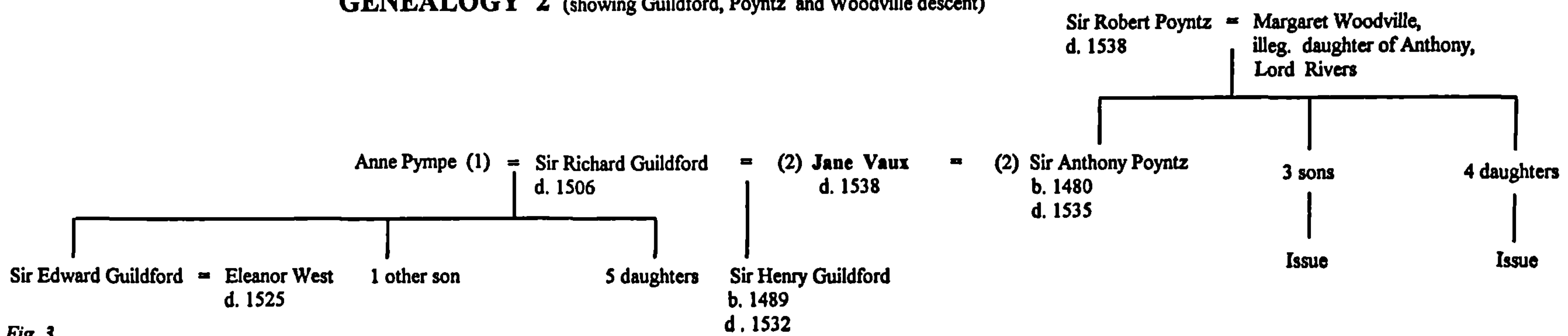


Fig. 3

result of her family connections to the Crofts, who seem to have had some links with the city in the later fifteenth century. Eleanor Croft's brother-in-law, Thomas, was appointed Customer of Bristol in 1472, and was an associate of Thomas Norton who wrongfully accused William Spencer, then Mayor of Bristol, of treason, an affair in which Croft was implicated.[79]

Elizabeth's will did not mention her place of residence at the time of writing, only referring to 'my bed in the chambre with all the parell there belonging' which she left to her son, Sir Edmund.[80] However, this may have been a room or set of rooms allotted to her somewhere in the precincts of the Gaunts, such as Jane Guildford appears to have later had. The institution certainly accepted boarders, although they were commonly of more humble status than Elizabeth.[81] Perhaps, after the trials and tribulations she had faced as a result of her husband's attainder and imprisonment, she found it expedient to retire to or near St. Mark's as a place of peace and sanctuary. She seems to have retained a certain fondness for the place where she must have spent a good part of her married life, leaving the generous sum of £30 'vnto the bilding of the tower of Borowȝghford and the leding thereof'. Nor did she forget her Herefordshire origins, leaving 'vnto the schryne of Saint Thomas of Harford my chayne of gold with my tabule of reliquos and other thingis hanging therby'. This last gift possibly marks her out as a woman of particular devoutness, although it is a pity that she did not describe the relics in detail or reveal something more of the nature of her devotion to the shrine and cult of St. Thomas Cantilupe in Hereford Cathedral, and whether it held a particular attraction for her or reflected more her feeling for the area of her birth and upbringing. However, most of Elizabeth's bequests were left to two Bristol institutions, the abbey of St. Augustine and St. Mark's, neither of which were much mentioned by the Bristol laity in their wills. By dedicating her soul 'vnto Almyghty God, to our Blessid Ladye, to Saint Marke and to all the saintes of hevene', she was one of the few Bristol testators, and the only

woman, to dedicate her soul to a specific saint other than the Virgin. It would appear that this dedication stemmed from her connection with 'the howse of Saint Mark by Bristowe called the Gauntis of Billeswike', to which she left £20 'to found an obite there yerely for me and for my frendis to be kept for euer', asking also for 'my body to be buryed within the churche of St. Marke within the chapell of Saint Nicholas', and bequeathing 40s 'to the making of a windowe' within the same chapel.[82] Elizabeth did not mention a specific design for the window in her will, although it may have contained a shield of the arms of her blood kin, the Lenthalls. Certainly such a shield exists in the present-day east window along with the Berkeley, De Gourney, De Grey and Sudeley arms.[83] Another 40s was left 'to the bilding of the est ende of the church of Saint Marke',[84] and she also bequeathed 'my litill flat pece and my litell salte siller with the couer vnto the howse of Sainte Marke' as well as the sum of 20s to 'Ser Iohn Randolf, brother of the Gauntis'. Her relationship with him may have been a close one, for he was named as an executor of her will, along with her son.

Unusually, she did not mention her deceased husband in the pious provision she made for her own soul and that of others, but she left bequests of her bed and 'my two best ringis' to her son Edmund, seventh Baron of Burford, who was the only survivor of her four children, and who died in the same year as his mother, and small bequests of clothing to her daughter-in-law and two granddaughters. She also mentioned a number of women, including Janet Ive, to whom she left 20s and 'a paire of shetys', and Jane Hopkyn who received from her 'a brode girdell'. It is likely that these women were living with her at Bristol and that together they formed a small group of women residing at the Gaunts. The last two legatees are of interest for the fact that they are also mentioned in the will of Lady Jane Barr, Elizabeth's relation by marriage, who had died five years before her. Janet Ive, whom Jane referred to as 'my gentilwoman', had been left by her a large number of household goods with the

specific request that she was 'to pray for me', while Jane Hopkyn was left £3 'to mary her and she to pray for me.'[85] (It is of interest to note that Jane Hopkyn was not in fact married five years later, but serving Jane Barr's relative, Elizabeth, thereby testifying to the strength and continuity of female networking among kin and social circles).

The connection between Lady Jane Barr, formerly Greyndour née Rugge or Rigge, with Elizabeth Cornwell, which can perhaps be said to have found its strongest expression in the piety of the two women, appears to have been either unknown or overlooked by the few historians who have written about Jane. Born at Charlcombe, just outside Bath, her family held lands there, as well as at Bitton and in Wiltshire. Her first husband was Sir Robert Greyndour, a member of a Gloucestershire gentry family, who died in 1445. After his death, she founded an elaborate chantry chapel at Newent in Gloucestershire and a grammar school, which was part of a perpetual chantry foundation, in the same place, this project appearing to have been carried out in fulfilment of her husband's wishes, although it is possible that the idea to found a school may have been a joint one between husband and wife.[86] After Robert Greyndour's death, Jane married Sir John Barr of Rotherwas, Herefordshire, the Barrs being another Hereford gentry family whose members had frequently married into the Cornwell and Lenthall families in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Elizabeth's mother-in-law had in fact been the sister of Sir John, Jane's second husband.[87] This suggests that Jane may have been some years older than Elizabeth, and that pious inclinations and characteristics could have been transmitted from the older to the younger woman. It may well have been her close relationship with Jane that drew Elizabeth to Bristol as much as her connections with the Croft family. In Jane's very long will of 1484, Elizabeth, whom she refered to as 'Elizabeth Cornwale, Maistres of Burford' was a major beneficiary and her bequests further testify to Elizabeth's piety and the strong bond between the two

women. As well as leaving to her beds, blankets, coverlets, sheets and rings, 'a deep saltsaler of silver and gilt', she also left her 'my grete matens booke covered with russett', 'a long rolle with xv oys and other divers prayers', and 'a long cheyne of gold with ij Agnes Dei closid in gold, one grete, another lesse, with diverse other reliks closid in gold hanging on the same cheyne for her nycke'.[88] Is it possible that some of these were the same relics later bequeathed by Elizabeth in her will to the shrine of St. Thomas Cantilupe at Hereford cathedral? Unfortunately, there is nothing to indicate what happened to the book and prayer roll, as they were not mentioned in Elizabeth's will. Possibly they had been given away by her before her death.

One further pious connection between the two women can be traced in the person of Sir Philip Beynon. Sir Philip had been one of Jane's chantry priests at the Newland school, and was obviously a close friend of hers, being left by her in her will various articles including two books. Sir Philip resigned this chantry post in 1485 for the vicarage of Lydney, Gloucestershire, and in 1488 moved on again.[89] However, he was obviously in touch with Elizabeth, being one of the few male beneficiaries of her will. She left to 'Ser Philip A Beynon my gilde salte', perhaps the same one that had been left to her by Jane. This hints at the possibility that the two women had both been part of a pious circle of women within Bristol, or with Bristol connections. Possibly, before her death Jane had visited or stayed with Elizabeth in the city, or even at St. Mark's, and it may be noted that amongst her bequests was a sum of money to 'doctor Spyne the which is a white frer at Bristow.'[90] This last bequest is of some interest for it must refer to Dr. John Spyne, Carmelite friar of Bristol, author of a number of theological texts, who died in 1484, a year before Jane.[91]

Other widows with family connections to Elizabeth are known to have stayed at St. Mark's after her death. In the sixteenth century, Lady Jane Guildford was one of the hospital's most illustrious residents, whose sojourn

has been mentioned in some of the histories of the city, although her connection with the Cornwell family does not appear to have been realized.[92] Elizabeth's sister-in-law, the redoubtable Lady Croft, had, from her first marriage to Hugh Mortimer, two children, a boy and a girl. The daughter, Elizabeth, married Sir Thomas West, and their daughter, another Eleanor, married Sir Edward Guildford who was to become Marshal of Calais, Lieutenant Warden of the Cinque Ports, Master of the Ordnance and Keeper of the Horse under Henry VIII. He was the son of Sir Richard Guildford of Kent by his wife, Anne Pympe, although after her death Guildford took as his second wife, Jane, sister of Sir Nicholas Vaux of Hawarden, who thereby became step-mother to Sir Edward, husband of Elizabeth's great-niece (see genealogy, p. 84).[93] Although Richard Guildford had been attainted under Richard III for his part in Buckingham's rebellion, under Henry VII he was appointed Master of the Ordnance in 1485 and Controller of the Household in 1492. In 1505, he set out on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, a journey recorded by his chaplain, dying there in 1506.[94] His wife Jane also enjoyed a career of some distinction, serving several female members of the royal household, including that pious matriarch, Lady Margaret Beaufort, and Elizabeth of York and her two daughters, Margaret and later Mary, as Lady-in-waiting when the latter was queen of France. From this last post she was dismissed by the French king Louis, Mary's spouse, but in 1514, was granted an annuity of £20 for her past services to the royal family.[95]

It is possible that the family connection between Jane and Elizabeth was a contributing factor to Jane's attachment to St. Mark's. She would have been a young woman at the time of Elizabeth's death, but old enough to have known her. The family link may also indicate that Eleanor Croft née Cornwell had stayed at Bristol with her daughter, Elizabeth, or her granddaughter, Eleanor Guildford née West, Jane Guildford's daughter-in-law. As far as other links between the two families are concerned, it may be significant that Lady

Guildford asked to be buried in the church of the Blackfriars in London, where Elizabeth Cornwell's son Edmund had asked to be buried, instead of at Burford church as might have been expected.[96] Another reason for Lady Guildford's stay at St. Mark's may have been her connection with the Poyntz family, for her second husband was Anthony Poyntz of Iron Acton (1480-1535), son of Robert (d. 1520), builder of the Poyntz or Jesus chapel in St. Mark's.[97] Whatever the reason, sometime in her widowhood, she retired to the Gaunts, having a residence somewhere in its precincts, as a letter written by her to Thomas Cromwell in 1534 makes clear. She wrote of her concern at 'certain injunctions that I understand are given to the master of the Gaunts in Bristol, that no woman shall come within the precincts of the same,' a comment that seems to indicate, in light of the fact that she had chosen to stay there with her female attendants, a strangely negative attitude to the presence of women in or near the hospital. In seeming contradiction to this statement, she went on to say that it was the place 'where I have a lodging most meetest, as I have chosen, for a poor widow to serve God now in my old days', which statement suggests that she viewed the hospital as a place suitable for widowed gentry women like herself to retire too. She wrote of her desire to avoid conflict over the issue and that 'I trust both for myself and for my women, like as we have hitherto, to be of such governance with your licence to the same, that no inconvenience shall ensue thereof'; this seems to indicate that there was indeed a small female community living at this time within the hospital or its grounds, despite the injunctions on women that Jane had earlier mentioned.[98] She further proposed 'that where hereto I have used from my howse to go the next way to the church, for my ease, through the cloister of the same house to a chapel that I have within the quire of the same, I shall be content from henceforth, if it shall so seem convenient unto you, to forbear that, and to resort to the common place, like as other do, of the same church.' It is clear from this that Lady Guildford must have had her own particular

St. Mark's Chapel, College Green *Fig. 4*

Right: East window panel showing the Lenthall arms in the top right-hand corner

Left: View into the Poyntz Chapel, St. Mark's

Fig. 5

Left: Mary Magdalene; a detail from the 'Noli me Tangere' painting, which decorated a closet in a room adjoining the hospital chapel. The painting, along with one of the Nativity, may have been intended for a female corrodian

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

chapel and favoured place to pray in with her women, perhaps a place where women had traditionally been known or allotted to pray. This may have been the devotional closet in the room which adjoined the south wall of the chapel on which were painted an image of the Trinity and scenes of the Nativity and Mary Magdalene kneeling before Christ, otherwise known as the 'Noli me tangere' painting. The squints in the wall of this closet allowed its viewers to look into the chapel, enabling them to follow the liturgy. Because of the subject matter of the paintings, which included the Virgin and Mary Magdalen, it has been suggested that the closet may have been specifically intended for a female corrodian.[99] The injunction mentioned by Jane Guildford in her letter that 'no woman shall come within the precincts of the same', despite its negative connotations for the women living within the Gaunts and its limitation (as implied by Jane) on their ability to move freely within the hospital precincts, nevertheless seems to hint at or recognize the existence of female space, or at least the potential for its creation and expansion. Thus it can be argued that where there were groups or traditions of pious women, the possibility always existed for the formation and consolidation of female social space. This could apply to situations where patronage was centred on those buildings where the lay community met to worship, as was the case with the wealthy female benefactresses of All Saints' church, or to an institution of male brethren where female gentry corrodians are known to have resided.

Despite the injunctions referred to by Lady Guildford, she appears to have remained on good terms with the master of the house, for she requested Cromwell, 'as it shall become me in this case to be a suitor, to license the master of the house with a chaplain, to go abroad to see for the common weal of the same'.[100] Furthermore, in her will, she bequeathed 'to the Maister of the Gauntes a gilt cupp' and £10 to 'Sir John at the Gauntes to pray for my soule'.[101] In light of the fact that St. Mark's hospital appears to have been a popular place for pious women to retire to, and that some gentry women had

strong connections with the house, it is of interest to note Colin Richmond's comments in an article on English culture in the late medieval period. He mentions the Poyntz or Jesus chapel built there between 1510-1520, suggesting that Margaret, illegitimate daughter of Anthony Woodville, earl Rivers, and wife of Robert Poyntz, the founder of the chapel, may have been the inspiration behind its construction.[102] It is certainly possible that the house and chapel of St. Mark's were well patronized by Margaret, particularly when it is remembered that her son, Sir Anthony, became Jane Guildford's second husband: although Margaret died before her husband, it is likely that the two women had known one another. There are also indications in the will of her husband, Robert Poyntz, that her role as a patron to the chapel may not have been negligible, for he instructed that 'a gown of blak velwett of myne and a gowne of blake velwett of my said late wyffe whiche gowne she by her will ordeyned to be made into vestmentes of the best and most conuenient maner with myne armes and hers vpon the same vestmentes to be inbroydred and with fystys also enbroydered holding fustys of flowers of rosys, margaretes, pawnces' were to be 'delyuerd by my said executores as of my gifte and of my wyfe to the said church of the Gauntes'.[103]

In this chapter, I have attempted to look at a comparatively little-researched topic, that of laywomen's networks within the larger urban community, in order to show its relevance to female piety and women's devotional lives, to suggest how one may have informed the other and how this may afford some view of medieval women's response to their allotted place in a patriarchal society. Knowledge of a woman's relationships with other women can be gleaned from testamentary bequests, particularly in the wills of widowed rather than single and married women, although the wills of urban women in general are perhaps a little less revealing than those of their noble or gentry counterparts. Nevertheless, bequests of religious objects or gifts with religious significance left by women to women suggest that patterns of pious

behaviour were passed on more readily, although not exclusively, through female lines of transmission, and were possibly linked to the fact that women shared common life experiences. As far as Bristol is concerned, other evidence—in the form of parish benefaction lists and churchwardens' accounts—can be used in conjunction with female wills to further the study of female networks and networking. Most of this relates to the families of the urban élite in the late fifteenth century and shows that there existed an influential and pious network of widowed women living within the central parishes of All Saints', St. John and St. Ewen. In particular, the surviving parish records of All Saints' church show that it attracted lavish patronage from a number of pious widows, and I have argued that their role as benefactresses to the parish church (which was possibly a more defining feature of female piety in the urban community than elsewhere)[104] allowed the creation of female social space. It is also evident that by the late fifteenth century, a network of gentry women with Hereford, Worcester and south Gloucestershire connections, related by blood and marriage, although having few obvious connections with the resident mercantile families of the city, resided temporarily or permanently in Bristol, many of them having links with the hospital of St. Mark. Close interconnections between women might be expected where laywomen were attached to a female religious house, but less so, perhaps, where they resided within an institution of male brethren like St. Mark's. Thus it can be argued that the existence of a female space within a traditional masculine space shows the strength of female networks and relationships between women. Fear of the invasion or usurpation of social space by women, particularly groups of women, and its possible implications for undermining the existing structures of society, can be detected in contemporary literature and thought. It may have lain behind the repeated exhortations and injunctions to be found in medieval conduct books and courtesy texts, where woman's role, including her pious duties as helpmate to her husband (who was to his household as a bishop to

his flock) was very much circumscribed and to be contained within domestic or family space, away from disruptive outside influences.[105] The same fear is perhaps also apparent in the recurring theme found in church wall-paintings and windows of groups of women talking (a fault particularly associated with the female sex) in church, thereby distracting from the pious message being propounded. It can also be detected in the injunctions mentioned by Jane Guildford in her letter of 1534. However, while female networking in its various forms may have allowed women to create and inhabit a place outside of the physical and mental boundaries traditionally assigned to them, I believe that this can be said to have reinforced and encouraged the formation of genuine piety and devotion rather than diverting attention away from it, or showing itself to be a subversive element in any way likely to undermine the existing structures of society. It is worth reiterating, however, that although there is considerable evidence of strong female networks among mercantile and gentry groupings in the late fifteenth century in Bristol, these appear to have been concentrated on different spatial locations in the city near or within different religious institutions, one sited centrally, the other to the western outskirts or margins of that community. In this respect, Bristol may have differed from other large urban centres such as London, York and Norwich, where there appears to have been greater integration between women of gentry and urban origin, although this is an area where more research needs to be done.

It is hoped that a study of female friendships and relationships has shown how networking among both mercantile and gentry groups was a formative and lasting influence upon, even an essential manifestation, of laywomen's piety within the larger urban community in the late medieval period, and I intend to return to the theme of female networks and piety in later chapters by looking at the relationships of laywomen with female religious in Bristol and charitable giving as practised by women.

NOTES

1. Philippa Maddern, 'Best trusted Friends: Concepts and Practices of Friendship among Fifteenth-Century Norfolk Gentry', in Nicholas Rogers (ed.), *England in the Fifteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1992 Harlaxton Symposium* (Stamford: Watkins, 1994), pp. 100-17 (p. 115).
2. Larry D. Benson (ed.), *The Canterbury Tales*, in *The Riverside Chaucer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 112, (lines 531-2, 536-7).
3. Wright, *Book of the Knight of La-Tour Landry*, p. 42.
4. Jonathan Alexander and Paul Binski (eds.), *Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England 1200-1400* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1987), pp. 444, 446.
5. Felicity Riddy, '"Women Talking about the Things of God": a Late Medieval Sub-Culture', in Carol M. Meale (ed.), *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 104-27 (p. 113).
6. Caroline Barron, 'Introduction: The Widows' World in Later Medieval London', in Barron and Sutton (eds.), *Medieval London Widows*, p. xxxiii; Carol M Meale, '"oft siþis with grete deuotion I þought what I miȝt do pleysyng to god": The Early Ownership and Readership of Love's *Mirror*, with Special Reference to its Female Audience', in Shoici Oguro, Richard Beadle and Michael G. Sargent (eds.), *Nicholas Love at Wasada* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997), pp. 19-46.
7. See Chapter 5, pp. 186-199 below.
8. See *ibid.*, pp. 179-83, for Isabel's possible involvement in her husband's foundation.
9. Great Orphan Book, f. 115^{r}.
10. *Ibid.*, f. 47^{v}.
11. *Ibid.*, f. 58^{r}.
12. PRO, PCC 12 Stockton (PROB 11/4), f. 92^{r}.
13. On the cult of St. John the Baptist in Bristol see Chapter 6, pp. 209-10 below.
14. Gilchrist and Oliva, *Religious Women in Medieval East Anglia*, p. 29.
15. Maud Baker's will is registered PRO, PCC 4 Holgrave (PROB 11/14), ff. 27^{v}-29^{v}. The relationship between Maud and her daughter Alice is discussed more fully in Chapter 7, pp. 250-8 below.
16. See Chapter 4, pp. 140-1 below.
17. PRO, PCC 10 Vox (PROB 11/10), f. 72^{v}.
18. See, for example, the 1389 will of Hugh le Hunt and the 1404 will of John Sloo in the Great Orphan Book, at respectively ff. 36^{v}, 141^{v}.
19. *Ibid.*, f. 193^{r}; PRO, PCC 26 Holgrave (PROB 11/14), f. 206^{r}.
20. Great Orphan Book, f. 115^{r}. I am unsure as to what precisely was meant by the term 'black saint', but it may have been the equivalent of the Black Madonna, images of which could be found at shrines across Europe in the medieval period. Some of these were carved in ebony, but others may have been blackened by the smoke of votive candles, and when repainted had their faces left black out of awe: see Marina Warner, *Alone of all her Sex: the Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1976; repr. London: Picador edn, 1985), pp. 274-5.
21. Rev. George S. Master, 'Some Gorges Wills', *PCAC*, 4 (1897), p. 244. As Agnes's original will, which is registered PRO, PCC 47 Marche (PROB 11/2b), f. 144^{r-v}, is now almost illegible, all quotes have been taken from Master's transcription; for the bequests left by Alice see PRO, PCC 14 Logge (PROB 11/7), f. 104^{r}.
22. Great Orphan Book, f. 254^{r}.
23. On book bequests between clergy and laity see Chapter 4, pp. 154-5 below.
24. Great Orphan Book, f. 163^{v}; PRO, PCC 26 Holgrave (PROB 11/14), f.

206^{r-v}.

25. See Carol M. Meale, '"alle the bokes that I haue of latyn, englisch, and frensch": Laywomen and their Books in Late Medieval England', in Meale, *Women and Literature in Britain*, pp. 128-58 (pp. 132-3).

26. See, for instance, Betty R. Masters and Elizabeth Ralph (eds.), *The Church Book of St. Ewen's, Bristol 1454-1584* (Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeolgical Society, Records Section VI, 1967), p. 9, where a 1454 church inventory records 'a gret matens boke wrytt with gret hand off parchement' donated by Dame Joan Parnaunt; see also Burgess, *Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints'*, p. 20, for Maud Baker's gift to that church of a 'mass book in prent [print] work, worth 15s'.

27. Tanner, *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich*, p. 126.

28. Atchley, 'Medieval Parish Records of the Church of St. Nicholas', pp. 35-7; BRO, St. Mary Redcliffe Inventory Book, P/StMR/ChW/3/(a), pp. 23-30 (modern pagination, no original foliation).

29. A number of wealthy Bristolians founded perpetual chantries in the medieval period, for the most part, in the years between 1330-80, the Halleways' foundation in the 1450s being amongst the last. For a list of perpetual chantry foundations in Bristol see Edith E. Williams, *The Chantries of William Canynges in St. Mary Redcliffe, Bristol* (Bristol: Georges; Oxford: Blackwell, 1950), pp. 32-41; see also Maclean, 'Chantry Certificates, Gloucestershire'.

30. BRO, Great Red Book, f. 247; the phrase is omitted in the printed version by Veale. For an account of Canynges's association with St. Mary Redcliffe see James Sherbourne, *William Canynges 1404-1474*, (Bristol: Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, 1985), p. 25. For Shipward's role as patron of St. Stephen's see William Barrett, *The History and Antiquities of the City of Bristol, compiled from Original Records and Authentic Manuscripts in the Public Record Office or Private Hands* (Bristol: Pine, 1789), p. 510, and Lucy Toulmin Smith (ed.), *The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the Years 1535-1543*, 5 vols (London: Bell, 1910), V, 93.

31. For Alice's overseas trading ventures see E. M. Carus-Wilson, *Medieval Merchant Adventurers* (London: Methuen, 1967), pp. 93-4, and for the house construction see Strong, *All Saints' City, Bristol Calendar of Deeds*, pp. 99-100. Alice's will is registered PRO, PCC 14 Logge (PROB 11/7), ff. 103^{v}-104^{r}.

32. Burgess, *Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints'*, p. 17.

33. Although the greatest beneficiary of her patronage was All Saints' church, she is also mentioned in the churchwardens' accounts of St. Ewen's from time to time, and in 1472 was evidently the most generous donor to 'the new vestementes of the blew sewte of velewett', having given the sum of £6 13s 4d towards them. It may be noted that the second most generous testator was also a woman, Elizabeth Sharpe, wife of a former mayor of Bristol: see Masters and Ralph, *Church Book of St. Ewen's*, p. 93.

34. Burgess, *Parish Church and the Laity*, p. 15. Widows of wealthy families such as the Nancothans, Rowleys and Sharpes were also generous to the churches of St. Ewen and St. John, and it may be that what applies to the widows of the church of All Saints applies to them too, but there is less evidence with which to demonstrate this effectively.

35. Burgess, *Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints'*, pp. 9-11. The listed gifts of Sir John Gyllarde and Sir Maurice Hardwick show that the two men were generous to their church, but still did not donate on the same scale as either Alice Chester and Maud Baker.

36. In his will, Henry Chester left his estate to his wife, intending perhaps that she would carry out his pious requests with it. His will is registered PRO, PCC 1 Wattys (PROB 11/6), f. 4^{v}.

37. Burgess, *Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints*, p. 15.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
41. PRO, PCC 14 Wattys (PROB 11/6), f. 104r. Leynell left a number of small bequests to All Saints' church in his will of 1473, although these are not recorded in the church book.
42. Great Orphan Book, f. 240r.
43. Burgess, *Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints'*, p. 19.
44. PRO, PCC 4 Holgrave (PROB 11/14), f. 28v.
45. Burgess, *Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints'*, p. 30.
46. Francis F. Fox (ed.), *Some Account of the Ancient Fraternity of Merchant Taylors of Bristol* (Bristol: Wright, 1880), pp. 112-3.
47. PRO, PCC 4 Holgrave (PROB 11/14), f. 28v.
48. Burgess, *Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints'*, pp. 23, 25, 30.
49. On the laity and religious orders see Chapter 4 below.
50. Burgess, *Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints'*, pp. 16, 20.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
55. Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 115, 236.
56. Meech and Allen, *Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 70.
57. For images of the Passion see in particular, the second, fourth and eighth revelations in Marion Glasscoe (ed.), *Julian of Norwich: A Revelation of Love* (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1976), respectively pp. 11, 14, 18.
58. R. N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe c.1215-c.1515* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 143.
59. PRO, PCC 14 Logge (PROB 11/7), f. 104r. The church book describes the altar of Our Lady as adjoining the image of Jesus: see Burgess, *Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints'*, p. 16.
60. PRO, PCC 4 Holgrave (PROB 11/14), f. 27v.
61. Burgess, *Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints'*, p. xxxxvii.
62. Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, p. 98.
63. It may be noted that Lady Jane Barr, one of the women linked to the group of women who resided at St. Mark's Hospital discussed above appears to have been devoted to the cult: see Rev. H. T. Ellacombe, *The History of the Parish of Bitton, in the County of Gloucester* (Exeter: Pollard, 1881), p. 310.
64. Veale, *Great Red Book of Bristol, Part III*, p. 108; Great Orphan Book, f. 206v.
65. C. Pamela Graves, 'Social Space in the English Medieval Parish Church', *Economy and Society*, 18 (1989), p. 315.
66. Barbara A. Hanawalt, 'At the Margin of Women's Space in Medieval Europe', in Robert Edwards and Vickie Ziegler (eds.), *Matrons and Marginal Women in Medieval Society* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1995), pp. 3, 8, 15.
67. See Margaret Aston, 'Segregation in Church', in W. J. Sheils and Diana Wood (eds.), *Women in the Church: Studies in Church History*, 27 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 237-94.
68. Burgess, *Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints'*, p. xi.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
70. Maud's friendships and relationships with other women are discussed more fully in Chapter 7, pp. 259-60 below.
71. For example, Margaret Croke, daughter and wife of a London alderman, spent her life in the capital and saw her daughter Elizabeth marry as her second husband William Stonor of the Oxfordshire gentry. Margaret could count the Duchess of Suffolk among her acquaintances: see Kay Lacey, 'Margaret Croke', in Barron and Sutton, *Medieval London Widows*, pp. 143-

72. For a history of the institution see W. R. Barker, *St. Mark's; or the Mayor's Chapel, Bristol* (Bristol: Hemmons, 1892), and Elizabeth Ralph and Henley Evans, *St. Mark's Hospital, Bristol* (Bristol: City of Bristol, 1979). See also the introductory section in C. D. Ross (ed.), *A Cartulary of St. Mark's Hospital, Bristol*, BRS, 21 (1959), pp. ix-xliv.

73. The existence of female gentry corrodians at the hospital is further suggested by the survival of a book dated 1502, which belonged to the library of St. Mark's, and which contains a form of confession for female penitents. The confession is printed in J. F. Nicholls and John Taylor, *Bristol Past and Present*, 3 vols (Bristol: Arrowsmith, 1881), II, 183-4, and the book as a whole described in Norris Matthews, *Early Books and Manuscripts in the City Reference Library, Bristol* (Bristol: Hemmons, 1909), pp. 66-7.

74. The name is often spelt Cornwall in modern usage, but as the name is written Cornwell in Elizabeth's will, I have retained this spelling.

75. A summary of Elizabeth's background can be found in Rt. Hon. G. S. Cecil, Earl of Liverpool and Compton Reade, *The House of Cornwall* (Hereford: Jakeman and Carver, 1908), pp. 197-202. She is not mentioned in the hospital's cartulary, or in any of the modern histories of the hospital.

76. C. S. L. Davies, 'The Crofts: Creation and Defence of a Family Enterprise under the Yorkists and Henry VII', *Historical Research*, 68 (1995), pp. 241-65 (pp. 244-5, 256).

77. See Cecil and Reade, *House of Cornwall*, pp. 195-6.

78. *CPR 1485-1494*, p. 94.

79. Davies, *The Crofts*, pp. 250-1. For an account of the Norton affair see *Adams's Chronicle*, p. 73. On Norton's life and activites see J. J. Simpson, 'St. Peter's Hospital', *TBGAS*, 48 (1926), pp. 193-226.

80. Elizabeth's will is registered PRO, PCC 23 Milles (PROB 11/8), f. 186^{v}. There is a transcription in Cecil and Reade, *The House of Cornwall*, pp. 281-2, whis is accurate, but for some reason leaves out a good half of the will, including some of the most important points relating to Elizabeth's piety.

81. For information on boarders at the house see Ross, *Cartulary of St. Mark's Hospital*, p. xvii.

82. The reference to St. Nicholas's chapel is puzzling, as it no longer exists and there appears to be no other contemporary reference to it. G. McN. Rushforth, 'The Painted Glass in the Lord Mayor's Chapel, Bristol', *TBGAS*, 49 (1927), p. 306, suggested that it might have been the chapel erected towards the end of the fifteenth century as a prolongation of the south aisle. Barker, *St. Mark's; or the Mayor's Chapel*, p. 191, mentions Robert Poyntz's will, which he says indicates that the chapel of Jesus, built by him between 1510-1520, was constructed on the site of a structure which had previously stood there. Had this been the chapel of St. Nicholas? For an alternative explanation to the siting of the chapel see n. 99.

83. Rushforth suggested that this was once part of a window in the chapel of St. Nicholas mentioned by Elizabeth. He seemed to link this with the fact that Elizabeth asked to be buried in that chapel, but did not seem aware that she had actually contributed to the making of a window there, perhaps because he relied on Cecil and Reade's transcription of the will, which left this out. It is of interest to note that Elizabeth chose to portray the arms of her own rather than those of her husband's family. For a diagram labelling the glass in the east window including the Lenthall arms see Ralph and Evans, *St. Mark's, the Lord Mayor's Chapel*, pp. 14-15.

84. The east end is generally supposed to have been built around about 1500, but Elizabeth's bequest suggests that building work may have started a little earlier. For an account of the building of the east end see Barker, *St. Mark's or the Mayor's Chapel*, pp. 162-3.

85. Jane's will is printed in Ellacombe, *History of Bitton*, pp. 309-16. It is a lengthy and fascinating document, revealing much about her piety, life-style

and social circle.
86. For an account of Lady Jane's background and the school foundation see Nicholas Orme, *Education in the West of England 1066-1548* (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1976), pp. 153-65.
87. Details of the marriages between Barrs and Cornwells can be found in John Duncomb, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Hereford*, 7 vols (Hereford: Wright, 1812), III, 93 and IV, 98-9.
88. Ellacombe, *History of Bitton*, p. 313.
89. Orme, *Education in the West of England*, p. 163.
90. Ellacombe, *History of Bitton*, p. 314.
91. A. B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A. D. 1500*, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), III, 1747, gives the books as *Conciones Aestivales with Incipit* and *Disputaciones without Incipit*.
92. Lady Guildford's stay is mentioned in Nicholls and Taylor, *Bristol Past and Present*, II, 184; see also John Taylor, 'The Hospital of St. Mark, commonly called Billeswike, or Gaunt's Hospital', *TBGAS*, 3 (1878-9), pp. 242-3.
93. For Eleanor Croft's first marriage and the Mortimer descent see Cecil and Reade, *House of Cornwall*, pp. 196-7.
94. For the account of the journey see Henry Ellis (ed.), *The Pylgrymage of Sir Richard Guylforde*, Camden Society, lst series, 51 (London, 1851). A Guildford pedigree drawn from BL, Additional MSS, 5711 can be found on p. 69.
95. J. S. Brewer and J. Gairdner (eds.), *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*, 21 vols (London: HMSO, 1862-1910), I, (ii), 1466.
96. Cecil and Reade, *House of Cornwall*, p. 203.
97. See John Maclean, 'Pedigree of Poyntz of Iron Acton', *TBGAS*, 12 (1887-8) pp. 149-5 (Table II). For the history of the Jesus chapel see Barker, *St. Mark's; or the Mayor's Chapel*, pp. 189-202.
98. It is, however, unclear from whom the injunctions mentioned in Jane's letter came, that is, the ecclesiastical authorities or elsewhere, the latter perhaps being indicated by the fact that the letter was addressed to Cromwell, Secretary of State.
99. Miriam Gill and Helen Howard, 'Glimpses of Glory: Paintings from St. Mark's Hospital, Bristol', in Laurence Keen (ed.), *Almost the Richest City: Bristol in the Middle Ages* (London: British Archaelogical Association, 1997), pp. 97-106 (pp. 91-2, 102-3, 106). Is it possible that this rather than those sites suggested in n. 82 above was actually the chapel of St. Nicholas mentioned by Elizabeth Cornwell?
100. Mary Anne Everett Wood, *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain from the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary*, 3 vols (London, Colburn, 1846), II, 160.
101. PRO, PCC 21 Dyngeley (PROB 11/27), f. 164^{v}.
102. Colin Richmond, 'Visual Culture', typescript paper (1995), pp. 24-6.
103. PRO, PCC Ayloffe (PROB 11/9), f. 223^{v}.
104. See Jennifer Ward, *English Noblewomen in the Later Middle Ages* (London and New York: Longman, 1992), p. 149, who suggests that the 'interest shown in parish churches in the wills of many noblewomen was minimal'.
105. See for instance Heath Barnum, *Dives et Pauper*, I (ii), 328, 339.

CHAPTER 3

NUNNERIES, THE FEMALE RELIGIOUS VOCATION AND THE LAITY IN LATE MEDIEVAL BRISTOL

Since this study is concerned primarily with the religious inclinations and devotional activities of urban laywomen, it makes obvious sense to look at their personal and familial links with those communities and individuals devoted or bound to the religious life, in order to discover how far and in what ways such links may have influenced or informed their piety. This chapter thus looks at the laity's relationship with and attitudes towards female religious houses. It should of course be pointed out that by the fifteenth century the popularity and influence of the monastic orders amongst both the urban and gentry populations appears to have declined from its high point in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[1] It can also be argued that monastic houses may have had less influence on the piety and devotional lives of the inhabitants of urban communities, as many of the former were often sited in isolated places, far from such centres, particularly Carthusian and Cistercian houses, in contrast to the friaries, which were sited in towns. In cases where monastic houses, usually those of the Benedictine order, were to be found within towns, the relationship between the religious and the laity could become one of outright hostility, with frequent clashes over propriatorial and jurisdictional rights. It also seems to be the case that the influence or popularity of monastic houses sited near or within urban areas depended on the social make-up of those communities, and the amount of noble and gentry influence alongside the mercantile within them, as some families of the former group often had strong family ties with a particular local house. This is especially significant as far as Bristol is concerned, as I have suggested that by the fifteenth century it had comparatively few links with the surrounding noble and gentry families. However, the city did possess a nunnery, and although it was small and, for most of its history, somewhat impoverished, by examining its relationship, along with that of the nearby house of Barrow Gurney in north

Somerset—and to a lesser extent, other nunneries within Wiltshire and Dorset — with the inhabitants of the urban community, it is possible to learn something, not only about the attitudes of wealthy Bristolians towards the female monastic vocation, but also how this may consequently have contributed to shaping female piety within the community. I have attempted to look at this in connection with bequests made to other groups of women such as hospital sisters and poor women, as the pattern of lay bequests to them shows some correlation with that to the various nunneries, and is thus relevant to the data on female religious as regards the changing perceptions of the urban laity towards the role or position of women in general. Although I have argued generally for the city's insular character, throughout this chapter I have attempted to look at these issues within the wider local context, comparing and contrasting the pious inclinations and preferences of the Bristol laity with those of their neighbours in Gloucestershire and Somerset.

The Nunnery of St. Mary Magdalene, Bristol

Whilst there is much evidence to suggest that close friendships and networks existed between groups of pious Bristol laywomen, there is less information to be found on links between laywomen and women religious in the city, or indeed, between female religious houses and the Bristol lay community in general. The city's tiny community of female religious, the nunnery of St. Mary Magdalene, a house of Augustinian canonesses, was situated at the bottom of St. Michael's Hill, its grounds extending down to those of the hospital of St. Bartholomew. Information on the origins of the nunnery and the lives of its inmates throughout the three and a half centuries of its existence is scarce, although it was founded in all probability by Eva, wife of Robert Fitzharding. In its early years, the nunnery may have served as a hospital, as evidenced by two of the thirteenth-century charters in the cartulary of St. Augustine's Abbey, and some of those to be found in the

cartulary of St. Mark's Hospital.[2]

The nunnery seems to have housed only a very small number of nuns at any one time, something remarked upon by William Worcester in his 1480 topography, where he referred to it in one place as the 'Ecclesiam Religionum beate marie magdalene, pauperis Religio trium monacharum' [church of the religious house of Blessed Mary Magdalen, a community of three poor nuns] and again as the 'Ecclesiam Religii Religionum nouitarum de santa maria Magdalena' [church of the nuns of the community of novitiates of St. Mary Magdalena].[3] At the Reformation, the number of inmates had shrunk even further, for it was said to possess only two nuns and two servants.[4] However, although the house was seemingly always small and poor, James Dallaway, who edited Worcester's account in the late eighteenth century, adding his own notes from various other sources, accorded it a certain prestige, referring to it as 'the nunnery of St. Mary Magdalene, consisting only of three professed nuns, but of many novices, by whom the daughters of the principal inhabitants were educated'.[5] It is possible that the daughters of the town élite were educated by the nuns, as nunneries could provide schooling for the daughters of the wealthier classes. Yet although a number of schools are known to have existed in medieval Bristol and some wills refer to the schooling of sons and nephews, I have found no evidence relating to the education of the daughters of élite families, and as Dallaway in this instance does not state his source, the information cannot be corroborated.[6] He further went on to assert that 'at the Reformation, they [the nuns] were held in so great estimation, that the visitors strongly recommended that they should not be dissolved, but without effect'.[7] In fact, there is very little information available about the nunnery in its final days, or the fate of its lands and buildings afterwards.[8] Of the two inmates left at the house's suppression, one was described as the governor, but 'impotent and aged', and the other as a young novice 'desiring continuance in religion'.[9] While

this last comment would suggest that the vocation of the inmates was genuine enough right up to the house's demise, the fact that there were only two nuns, one of whom was quite aged, warns that Dallaway's statement should be treated with some caution. Furthermore, if the nuns had been so influential in the education of the daughters of the Bristol burgesses, and were held by them in such high esteem, we might reasonably expect that not only would they have been mentioned by more testators, but that such testamentary bequests would have continued well into the fifteenth century. Yet by the time Worcester was writing in about 1480, lay testators had seemingly ceased to remember them. A survey of the wills in the Great Orphan and Great Red Books reveals that between 1375-1499, about 7 per cent of all testators left bequests to a nunnery; although St. Mary Magdalene was the most frequently-mentioned house, its popularity seems to have waned after 1420, and after 1475, it was not, as far as I have been able to tell, mentioned by any of the testators whose wills were recorded in the above books. Furthermore, other references to it in deeds and civic records, which were anyway always few, also dried up, suggesting that its influence upon or importance within the urban community may have declined. A 1333 entry in the Great Red Book contains a copy of the 'ordinatio' relating to the perpetual chantry foundation of Roger Cantok in the conventual church. The instructions for the maintenance of the chantry are conventional enough, although the entry is noteworthy for the fact that such foundations were rare in nunneries, and further indicates that the profile of St. Mary Magdalene was higher in the fourteenth century than the fifteenth.[10]

It is of interest to note however, that despite its small size and poverty, most of the bequests made to the nunnery by male testators in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries were from men such as Peter att Barugh, Robert and William Chedder and Elias Spelly, who came from the very wealthiest élite families. The bequests were usually sums of money ranging

between 20s and 40s with extra small sums sometimes being left for each individual nun. Only Walter Seymour in his 1409 will left to the nunnery 'vnum par vestimentis et ij couertys ad orandum pro anima mea' as well as money.[11]

Very few Bristol women mentioned nunneries in their wills, the overall figure being less than 3 per cent of all female testators. The paucity of bequests appears to go against the general trend of female gift-giving to nunneries, for in other places where this has been looked at, female testators apparently show a marked partiality towards such institutions.[12] Although one wealthy Bristol woman, Maud Baker, left money and goods in her 1503 will to her daughter Alice, a nun at Shaftesbury, and to the abbess there, the wills of other women who mentioned female religious houses date from before 1420. They all mentioned the house of St. Mary Magdalene, the earliest of them being Joan Brompton who in 1401 left 10s to each of the city's four friaries and 10s also to the female houses of St. Mary Magdalene and Barrow Gurney.[13] Joan's will is brief, however, and it is not clear whether she was single, married or widowed, although the Brompton surname crops up in a number of early-fifteenth-century wills. Yet the Bromptons do not appear to have belonged to the city's highest élite families.

More interesting in this respect, perhaps, is the will of the twice-married Alice Wodeford, possibly the widow of a cloth trader. In 1407 she left 2d to the 'monialibus Beate Marie Magdalene' and the same sum to both the 'sororibus Sancti Bartholomei', a reference to the order of sisters attached to the hospital of St. Bartholomew discussed in more detail below, and the 'mulieribus pauperibus domus siue hospitali Sancti Johannis Baptiste extra portam de Redeclyve' [the poor women of the hospital of St. John the Baptist beyond Redcliffe gate].[14] The hospital of St. John contained inmates of both sexes, so the women, it seems, were specifically singled out, and although the sums of money left were small, the fact that she grouped nuns together with

hospital sisters and poor female hospital inmates strikes me as being of some interest. Although the sisters of St. Bartholomew were often mentioned together with the nuns of St. Mary Magdalene or those of Barrow Gurney by male testators, poor women, the female recipients of charity, were not usually included with them, as in this case. Does this indicate that Alice saw different categories of women in medieval society as sharing some forms of religious experience, particularly if, as was almost certainly the case although it was not stated, the sums of money were intended for the women of each of these institutions to pray for the soul of the testatrix?

Apart from Joan Brompton and Alice Wodeford, Agnes Spelly, wife of Elias, and a woman of notable piety, left to the 'priorisse de Madalena, Bristolle et sororum' a 'par vestimentorum et 1 calicem' [pair of vestments and one chalice], while Agnes Gorges, another widowed testatrix of highly devout inclination left in her 1419 will, 20s to the house of St. Mary Magdalene, double the sum that she left to the city's Dominican friary and considerably more than the 6s 8d that she left to each of the other three orders of friars.[15] Thus, early in the period under discussion, a few women appear to have held the nunnery in some esteem No other woman after this left a bequest to the nuns of St. Mary Magdalene, although the Little Red Book of Bristol, regarding the nunnery, contains a curious entry which suggests that some laywomen may have been more closely connected with the city's female religious community than the testamentary evidence would suggest. It is dated 1423 and records the death of one Enmota Chilcombe, 'nuper de Bristollia', who was buried in All Saints' church. The entry was made 'ad instanciam et rogatum Johanne Waleys protunc Priorisse domus beate Marie Magdalene infrascripte et sororum euisdem loci ac Johannis Haddon, Vyntner' [at the request of Joan Wales, Prioress of the house of the blessed Mary Magdalene, and the sisters there, and John Haddon, Vyntner].[16] There is no explanation as to why this information was recorded in the book, but the fact that it was

made at the instigation of the prioress of the house and John Haddon, one of the town worthies, who along with his wife Christine was a generous benefactor to All Saints' church, suggests that some of the wealthy inhabitants of that parish had links with the nunnery. Of Enmota Chilcombe little information can be found, but she may have been a woman of some piety, for she is mentioned in the All Saints' list of good-doers as donating 'a chalice of 13¾ ozs'.[17] In the absence of any records relating specifically to the nunnery, we can only speculate at her association with it. She may have had a relative who was a nun there, or perhaps resided there herself as a widowed laywoman, although I have uncovered no other evidence of laywomen living there. Whatever the case, it seems likely that she had shown some generosity to the house and was held in esteem by the nuns and Prioress Joan Wales. Of this woman too little is known except that she became prioress in 1421 and served in this capacity for more than thirty years, as there exists a 1455 licence from James, Lord Berkeley, 'to the sisters and Convent of St. Mary Magdalene, near Bristol, to elect a Prioress in the place of Johanna Waleys, deceased'.[18] There is no concrete evidence to suggest that Joan came from the city, although it is a possibility, as the Wales surname was not uncommon in Bristol at this time. Testamentary evidence does not indicate that members of the Bristol laity had female relatives who became sisters at the house, although no material survives actually listing all the women who were nuns there at any one time. A number of the names of the prioresses are known, but little or nothing of their family origins or backgrounds.[19] Thus, despite Dallaway's comments which seem to indicate that the nuns played a not inconsiderable part in the lives of the citizens right up to the Dissolution, the evidence from fourteenth- and fifteenth-century wills, deeds and corporation books suggests that the affairs of the nunnery impinged much less or very little upon the lives of the laity by the mid-fifteenth century. The comparative lack of interest shown by the Bristol laity in the nunnery may also have been affected to some

degree by the city's topographical layout, as it was set somewhat apart from the central city parishes.[20]

Furthermore, the nunnery does not appear to have attracted much attention from local noble or gentry families in this period, apart from, as might be expected, the occasional bequest by a member of the Berkeley family, the last of these appearing to be that left by the third Thomas Berkeley in his 1362 will of 'vnum psalterum glosatum et legendum sanctorum in Anglicis,' along with a pair of vestments, a chalice and 100s.[21] The only Somerset testator to make a bequest was Stephen Forster (d. 1458) of nearby Stanton Drew, who became a wealthy London fishmonger, and who left in his will '100s. to the Priory of nuns of St. Mary Magdalene, Bristow', a far larger money bequest than those usually left to the nunnery.[22] Forster, however, had Bristol connections, being a friend of William Canynges, and possibly a relative of John Foster, who founded the almshouse at the bottom of St. Michael's Hill. He appears to have been a pious and conscientious individual, as shown by his lengthy will, in which he left money to a large and varied number of religious institutions and good causes. Although it is not possible to establish the exact nature of his link with the nunnery, the fact that he left to it a sum of money five times the value that he left to each of the city's friaries, and considerably more than he left to the London friaries, suggests that he held it in high regard. Generally, however, the attitude of the Bristol citizenry and the local gentry towards the nunnery in their midst appears to have differed somewhat to that of the laity of other large cities where nunneries were sited. Although, according to Norman Tanner's study, the nunnery at Norwich, in the south-eastern suburb of Carrow, received fewer testamentary bequests than the friaries, the overall figure of 16 per cent of the city's testators is more than twice the percentage of Great Orphan and Great Red Book testators who mentioned the sisters of St. Mary Magdalene.[23] Similarly, as regards Clementhorpe nunnery in York, the lives of whose inmates 'seem to have been closely linked with those of the

secular inhabitants of York', bequests either to the house itself or to individual nuns there were evidently quite frequent by both the Yorkshire gentry and the citizens of York, and this remained the case until the Dissolution. In Clementhorpe's case, the conventual church was also the parish church of that suburb, so it is not surprising that the affairs and religious concerns of the city's inhabitants and the nunnery were sometimes closely entwined.[24] David Thomson, in his study of piety and charity in medieval London, gives a figure of 10.7 per cent for bequests to nunneries, again higher than the Bristol figure, although lower than for Norwich.[25]

Other Nunneries

As regards nunneries outside the city and its suburbs, two of the three Somerset houses, the Benedictine house of Cannington and the house of Augustinian canonesses at Mynchin Buckland near Taunton, failed to attract bequests from Bristol testators.[26] However, the third, another Benedictine foundation at Mynchin Barow, modern-day Barrow Gurney, up to about 1410, appears to have received almost the same number of bequests from Bristol testators, male and female, as the house of St. Mary Magdalene. The principal reason for this was doubtless because of its close proximity to Bristol, being situated only eight miles to the south-west of the city.[27] It also had ancient links with the Gurney and Berkeley families, both of whom had founded religious institutions in Bristol in the 1100s, and who were related by marriage. The Gurneys had held the manor of Barrow since the conquest and it is thought that the nunnery was founded by a woman of that family, either Eve, a half-sister of Maurice de Gaunt, founder of St. Mark's, or her mother, Hawise, and several women of the Gurney family served as prioresses well into the fourteenth century.[28]

All of the gifts left by Bristol testators were sums of money, ranging from the 2d left by Alice Wodeford to the more generous sums left by the wine

merchant and Mayor of Bristol, Walter Derby, in his 1385 will, of 66s to the 'priorisse et monialibus de Barugh', plus a further 13s to the prioress and 2s to every other nun.[29] As well as the testamentary bequests, there is a record of the perpetual chantry founded in 1370 in the nuns' church by John Blanket, a member of a leading Bristol family of the period. To support the foundation, he left two messuages and two shops with their gardens and appurtenances, while the nuns were to ensure that a chaplain prayed daily 'pro salubri statu maioris et Communitatis ville Bristollie Johannis Blancket et Cristine, uxoris eius dum vixerint et pro animabus eorundem cum ab hac luce migraverint', [for the good health of the Mayor and Commonalty of the town of Bristol, John Blanket and Christine, his wife, for as long as they live and for their souls when they migrate from this life] and for the lives and souls of various other family members.[30] As perpetual foundations in nunneries were a rarity, this probably indicates a strong association with or allegiance to the house, although in the absence of wills or other material relating to the Blanket family, it is not possible to know whether either John or Christine had female relatives at the house. For most of the period of the nunnery's existence, only the names of some of the prioresses, sub-prioresses and a few individual nuns are known, and although the nunnery received a fair number of bequests from Bristol testators in the late fourteenth century, there is no concrete evidence that any of the nuns came from the city.[31] The above-mentioned Walter Derby singled out one individual nun, 'Isabelle Poleyne' who was to receive 6s 8d, although whether she was related to him is unclear. She was also mentioned in the 1378 will of Robert Broun, an associate, perhaps a relative of Derby, where she received 6s.[32]

However, in the early 1400s, the house which was small and never wealthy, like many other nunneries countrywide, faced considerable financial shortfall and became increasingly impoverished, a condition possibly exacerbated by the falling away of money bequests or gifts. The wills of Bristol testators in the

Great Orphan and Great Red Books show that there was a sudden decline in the number of bequests made to the house in the second decade of the fifteenth century, a decline that was certainly more rapid than that experienced by the house of St. Mary Magdalene. In 1415, John Sutton, a wealthy merchant, left a bequest of property rents to the nunnery, while in his 1419 will, John Goodson left to it a small sum of money, but after this it was not mentioned again.[33] A specific reason for the decline in popularity amongst Bristol testators in Barrow's case, although it may not explain completely its abruptness, is that it may have occurred because the inhabitants of the city had become more urbanized in character and outlook by the early fifteenth century. I am referring here to those of the Bristol élite who in the early-to-mid fourteenth century appear to have originated in, or to have had family connections with places in north-west Somerset, more specifically in and around the Barrow area and who, although they moved to Bristol and became prosperous and important citizens, still retained some allegiance to their former places of origin and nearby or associated religious institutions. As the descendants of these people became more assimilated or integrated into Bristol society, they may have felt less closely, if at all, aligned with those institutions that had previously been patronized by family members. Such examples may include the Blankets, who first appear in the lists of Bristol aldermen in the 1340s, and the Derbys who appear a decade later. Although Walter Derby was one of the most generous testators to Barrow, his daughter Isabel (d. 1411) and her husband, Mayor John Barstaple, pious though they were, did not mention the nunnery in their wills, nor did his other daughter Alice (d. 1414) and her husband John Warminster, one-time sheriff of Bristol.[34] Others, like the various branches of the Chedder family, who patronized the nunnery in the fourteenth century, either did not stay in Bristol, returning to their place of origin, or died out in the male line.

Apart from Barrow Gurney, very few Bristol testators mentioned other

nunneries outside the city. There were, in fact, none in Gloucestershire, but it is worth mentioning the small Benedictine nunnery of Kington St. Michael in Wiltshire, three miles north of Chippenham, which owned various tenements and properties in the city in this period, and with which there appear to have been some Bristol connections. The only testamentary bequest to be found in the Great Orphan and Great Red Books was that left by John Sutton, who as well as patronizing the nuns of Barrow left to the 'prioresse de Kyngston totum statum meum quem habeo in duabis shopis in Bast Stret' and 50s in money.[35] However, another Bristol link is suggested by an entry in the Kington Book of Obits, which lists among the nunnery's prioresses and benefactors under the June remembrances the names of 'Thomas Knapp and Avyce his wife'.[36] This may be a reference to Thomas Knapp of Bristol, who was married to an Avyce, and who founded a chapel dedicated to St. John the Evangelist on Welsh Back in the early fifteenth century. In the same manuscript, there are also indications that some of the house's prioresses, at various times in its history, were from or connected with Bristol. The name of Edith of Bristow appears in the list of prioresses to be remembered, and although there is no other extant material on this woman, it is probable that she served as prioress sometime in the late 1200s or early 1300s, as the dates of the prioresses who served after this date are known, and she does not occur among them.[37]

As for other Wiltshire houses, Amesbury was mentioned once, and the prestigious house at Wilton not at all. The nuns of Lacock, not far from Kington, do not seem to have attracted bequests from the fifteenth-century Bristol laity, although the abbey's cartulary records gifts left by a few of the city's inhabitants in the thirteenth century.[38] Regarding nunneries outside of Somerset and Wiltshire, the small Cistercian nunnery of Tarrant Crawford in Dorset was mentioned by one testator, John Leycester, who in 1436 left a small money bequest to Lady Emmot Payn, a nun there. Again, it is unclear

whether she was related, although as his wife was also called Emmot, this may have been the case; she was, perhaps, his wife's widowed mother, or a widowed daughter of the Leycesters.[39] Only one Great Orphan Book testator, the wealthy Bristol merchant, William Rowley, left a bequest to a group of religious women from outside the local region. Rowley died in the small town of Dam in Flanders and in his nuncupative will of 1479 left eight crowns of French money to the 'religiosis personis domicellis Sancti Agnetis ibidem ordinis Sancti Augustini pro humanitate per easdem persista in extremis' [the religious ladies of St. Agnes there, of the order of St. Augustine for their continued kindness at my deathbed].[40] As there were no houses of Augustinian canonesses in medieval Flanders, but only four convents of Poor Clares and two Dominican nunneries, was this therefore a reference to the beguinage in that town, which had been founded in the mid-thirteenth century probably by the Countess Margaret of Flanders, or alternatively, one of the communities of the Sisters of the Common Life established in most urban centres in the Low Countries in the fifteenth century?[41]

The Female Religious Vocation and the Bristol Laity

While the individual nuns occasionally mentioned in the wills of Bristol testators may have been relatives, I have found very few definite cases of women from Bristol families entering upon a religious vocation in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Indeed, they barely register as a percentage, although taken individually they are of some interest. Elias Spelly, whose family was possibly of Worcestershire origin, but who served as mayor of Bristol four times in the late fourteenth century, left in his 1390 will 40s to the 'fabrice domus Sancte Marie Magdalen, Bristol', along with 66s 8d to the 'fabrice domus Sancte Marie Magdalene in Wigorn', and another 66s 8d to 'Elene Spelly, sorori eiusdem domus'.[42] This Worcestershire convent was the small Cistercian nunnery of St. Mary Magdalene, at Whistones (modern-day

Aston), near the Shropshire border, a few miles from Ludlow, where Elene Spelly is recorded as being one of the six nuns present at the election of Prioress Agnes de Monyngton in 1349.[43] This would presumably put her at an age of about sixty by the time Elias wrote his will, and suggests that she was most likely his sister. The Spellys were a highly devout family, with Elias himself being a munificent benefactor to the chapel of the Blessed Mary of the Assumption on Bristol bridge. He also exhibited great concern for the sick and needy, and left bequests in his will, not only to the female religious houses mentioned above, but to male houses in south Gloucestershire, singling out some individual monks by name. Like Elene, he appears to have had a leaning towards the Cistercians, asking to be buried in the church of the Cistercian monastery at Kingswood. Thus, it would appear that this austere monastic order was held in particular regard by the Spelly family.[44] It was not until more than 100 years later that Alice Baker, daughter of Thomas Baker (d. 1492), merchant and grocer, entered the prestigious house of Shaftesbury at around the age of twenty-five, although it seems that she may have entered as a widowed rather than unmarried woman.[45] In the cases of both Elene Spelly and Alice Baker, it may be noted that their family, or certain family members, probably the ones who influenced them the most (in Alice's case, her step-mother, Maud, a woman conspicuous by her piety), while not themselves members of religious orders, appear to have been attracted to particularly austere or ascetic forms of the religious life. While the Spellys patronized the Cistercians, Maud Baker's will strongly hints at a leaning towards the Carthusian order.[46] I have only come across one other Bristol woman who entered a religious house, this being Maud Thorne, sister of Robert and Nicholas, who established the grammar school at St. Bartholomew's in 1532. She became a nun at Lacock, although no dates are available as to when she entered the house and when she died, and she was not mentioned in the wills of either her father or her two brothers.[47]

Even though the popularity and influence of the monastic orders in general seems to have fallen by the fifteenth century, the fact that so few women from the higher ranks of Bristol society chose such a life does I feel, invite some comment, particularly as the city appears to have differed somewhat in this respect from other large urban centres in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Sylvia Thrupp, writing about the merchant families of medieval London, stated that the daughters of urban families there 'were much attracted by the pleasantness of the monastic life and the high social esteem it enjoyed', while Caroline Barron and Anne Sutton, in their work on London widows in the late medieval period, have found that, of the individual women whose lives they and other historians have researched, a number 'came from families where several of their relatives were priests or monks, or had become nuns'.[48] However, it should be noted that some of the women included in this collection came originally from a noble or gentry background, rather than an urban one. Elsewhere, although it has been stated that 'little is known of the geographical and social origins' of the inhabitants of Clementhorpe in York, it appears that most of them came 'from the city and its environs', and a number of the daughters of wealthy citizens (including various mayors of York), are known to have served as nuns there, some becoming prioresses.[49] Moving to East Anglia, Norman Tanner states that a number of Norwich citizens had relatives who entered Carrow nunnery in the suburbs, although he concludes from his study of Norwich wills that only 2 per cent of testators overall had daughters who became nuns at Carrow or elsewhere, a small percentage, but still higher than the Bristol figure.[50] Tanner's figure does not, however, sit comfortably with research done by Gilchrist and Oliva on Norwich and East Anglia, as they claim that urban dwellers made up 16 per cent of the occupants in the region's religious houses.[51]

It is difficult to know whether the lack of girls and women from among the Bristol élite choosing to embark upon the religious life was due to a lack of

empathy with such a life on their part, or whether they were discouraged from formulating or entertaining such pious notions by their families, or possibly a combination of the two. Here, the social and economic factors that lay behind the make-up and mentalité of medieval Bristol's élite society should be borne in mind. The highest social strata of late medieval Bristol comprised, for the most part, a group whose fortunes and life-styles were built and continued to rely on trading enterprise. This, it has been previously suggested, led to the growth of a certain insularity on the part of its wealthier inhabitants, an insularity which was both geographical and ideological, and which could be seen to manifest itself in the pious acts and concerns of the religiously-inclined amongst fifteenth-century Bristol merchants, who preferred to spend their money on building and beautifying the parish churches, chapels, hospitals and almshouses within the city and its suburbs, rather than to institutions outside it, which included the nearby monastic houses of Gloucestershire and Somerset. It can also be said that the élite of Bristol, to a considerable degree and increasingly as the fifteenth century progressed, appears to have distanced itself from its own community of female religious. As its links with such institutions were not therefore that strong, this may have led to a less than supportive or sympathethic attitude on the part of wealthy urban parents towards those of their daughters who desired to enter a religious order, or even an indifference to the monastic vocation in general. This hypothesis would also apply in some degree to men too, going some way towards explaining why only a small number of young men from Bristol's mercantile families should have chosen to enter upon a monastic vocation, despite the fact that many merchants' sons are known to have become members of the secular clergy.[52] To some extent, an increasing trend towards concentrating one's pious patronage on the parish church can be encountered in other places, both urban and rural, and amongst gentry and mercantile communities by the fifteenth century, but certain social and economic factors peculiar to Bristol

may have meant that it was more marked among the laity of that city.[53]

Looking at the wider local context in regard to the female monastic vocation, in the rare cases where the surnames of individual Somerset nuns are known, it seems that a number of them probably came from local gentry families, but this is not always certain.[54] Only four out of 300 testators, or just over 1 per cent, mentioned that they had daughters who were or intended to become nuns, and one of these lived at Cannington, where a nunnery was sited.[55] Thus, it may be the case that, compared with the local region, Bristol was not so unusual in having only a small number of women who entered female religious houses. There were, of course, fewer nunneries in the south-west than there were in other parts of the country like Yorkshire and East Anglia, and this may have been a factor that lay behind the phenomenon. However, the wills of nearby Wiltshire families as a whole appear to show a greater concern with the female religious vocation, although the county only possessed four nunneries, something discussed briefly in Andrew Brown's study of popular religion within the diocese of Salisbury. He suggests that the nunneries of Amesbury, Lacock and the prestigious house of Wilton attracted entrants to the religious life right through the period, most of these coming from local gentry families. As far as urban communities are concerned, the only settlement of any real size in the county was Salisbury, where between 1350-1499 at least four testators out of 247, or 2 per cent, are known to have had daughters who became nuns at Amesbury and Shaftesbury in Dorset, more in actual numbers and as a percentage of testators than I have found for Bristol, but not by a great deal. However, the suggestion that the nuns of Lacock were 'probably drawn from the prosperous burgess families at Bristol, Gloucester and Cirencester'[56] has only been very slightly borne out by my research as far as Bristol is concerned, although it seems that the nunnery had associations with a number of South Gloucestershire families.

Yet even though the evidence points to the possibility that comparatively few

Bristol women became nuns, and that female religious institutions did not arouse the same interest amongst the city's lay population as in large provincial cities elsewhere, it is still noticeable that more of the city's testators left bequests to nunneries in the late fourteenth century and the period before 1420 than afterwards, while after 1440 they figured much less in wills, particularly female wills, and barely at all in other material. For these trends, there appears to be no one obvious explanation. I have suggested that the increasingly urbanized character and consequent social insularity of the Bristol élite may have contributed to the decline in bequests to Barrow, a house which a number of fourteenth-century Bristol citizens appear to have held in some regard. It is also true that female religious houses countrywide found themselves facing increasing financial straits and falling numbers in the fifteenth century, due to a combination of economic factors, natural disasters and possibly bad management on their part, with the plight of smaller houses, which had often been initially inadequately endowed anyway, being particularly severe.[57] The nunneries of Barrow and St. Mary Magdalene can both be classed amongst these, and such difficulties may partially account for the decline in their prestige and status as far as the urban community was concerned. Yet, despite this, and the evidence which indicates that there was a general fall in bequests to religious houses, male and female, by this period, it is still not easy to account for such a noticeable decline in bequests by Bristol testators from the second decade of the fifteenth century, particularly as a similar decline does not appear to have been experienced by nunneries in or near other large urban centres, or in the local counties of Somerset and Wiltshire.

However, I have found that interesting parallels can be drawn from the bequests of Bristol testators to nuns, and bequests by them to other groups of women, which may bear some relation to one another. It may not be a coincidence that bequests to nuns and nunneries, along with bequests to the

hospital sisters of St. Bartholomew's (both as a group and individuals) were at their highest towards the end of the fourteenth and the first decade of the fifteenth centuries, a period when some women possibly experienced greater economic and social freedoms than they had before, or were to afterwards.[58] By the second decade of the fifteenth century, they were no longer mentioned at all by testators, although it is evident that sisters were attached to the hospital right down to the transfer of the buildings to the Bristol grammar school in 1532, for the foundation charter of the school mentions 'the brethren and sisters of the hospital', although it gives no information as to their duties or the position held by them at this time.[59] It may have been the case that, even though they were still sometimes referred to as hospital sisters, their posts became downgraded in the employment stakes, so that they came to fill more the role of domestic servants, performing a greater number of menial and domestic tasks and fewer medical or religious duties. Indeed, according to Orme and Webster, this may have been a general occurrence. They have pointed out that female servants became increasingly common in the fifteenth century, with houses and hospitals preferring to recruit servants rather than lay-sisters, a trend which may have been accelerated by 'fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century almshouse foundations for the infirm', where such women were often appointed to look after elderly almsmen or women.[60]

However, the second decade of the fifteenth century, which saw a drop in the number of bequests to nuns and hospital sisters, was also a period which began to show changes in the nature of charitable bequests left to poor women. Whereas, in the closing years of the fourteenth and the opening years of the fifteenth centuries, bequests to all types and groups of poor women, including the sick, the old and infirm, inmates of hospitals, widows and those referred to merely as 'poor women', had been fairly common, by the second (and even more the third decade) of the fifteenth century, these had very much declined, with female testators preferring to leave bequests to poor individual

women whom they knew personally. Male testators still left bequests to groups of poor women, but these were nearly always in the form of dowries for unmarried women.[61] In light of these changes, it is not inconceivable, perhaps, that the fall in bequests to nuns was related to social and economic changes affecting the position of laywomen. Although, as argued previously, such changes may have affected most obviously or immediately those women who worked for their living, it may well have influenced the attitudes of society towards the activities or life-styles of women in general, especially, perhaps, those women who could in some sense be seen to be living apart from the mainstream of society, and who could, to an extent, be considered as being in control of their own lives. Indeed, the increasing number of bequests for dowry payments in the fifteenth century, to poor, single women who could be classified as being of marginal but yet independent status, may have stemmed, in part, from a fear or assumption that they posed more of a threat or danger to the ordered well-being of society than if they were respectably married. In times of greater prosperity, these issues may not have assumed as much prominence in the social consciousness as in times when the economy and society appeared to be in a state of flux or decline, as was the case in the fifteenth century, when various female groupings or institutions may have found their activities and position scrutinized more carefully by lay and ecclesiastical authorities, and experienced a falling away of support, or a growing apathy or even suspicion towards them. This could well have included women from all different levels of the social spectrum, and perhaps, not just those from the humblest backgrounds. Certainly, with regard to the hospital sisters of St. Bartholomew's, there is clear evidence of attempts by the ecclesiastical authorities to take away from them powers that they had accrued in the fourteenth century regarding the running of the hospital. An entry to be found in the register of Henry Wakefield, Bishop of Worcester, dated 1386, refers to an inquiry carried out regarding St. Bartholomew's, including such

issues as the rights of election to the Mastership and what type of rule the inhabitants lived under, but in particular 'what sort and which sex have been the persons having governance of the house for the past 40 years.' In 1387, a certificate was sent in reply, stating that the house 'has been governed for the past 40 or 50 years by persons of the male sex' which almost certainly had not been the case.[62] The sisters clearly challenged this for in 1412, when another similar enquiry took place, judgement was once more found against them.[63] There is no evidence that the issue was raised again, and the sisters thereafter appear to have lost ground and status, and correspondingly, their prestige seems to have fallen among the laity. Evidently, the sisters had exercised a considerable degree of administrative control, and it is of interest to note that it was not until the late fourteenth (and, even more so, the second decade of the fifteenth) century that this was seen to be a problem, reflecting the anxiety felt by those in authority that the women had gained a position of too much power, over and above what was deemed appropriate for their sex. The judgements given as a result of the two inquisitions deprived the women of any real power or position of authority that they might have attained, even if this had never been given any official sanction, and this must surely have contributed to the downgrading of their role in the 1400s. Furthermore, the decline in the importance or value of the sisters' position doubtless affected the light in which they were viewed by pious members of the laity, and would go some way towards explaining why bequests to the sisters, which had not been uncommon up to the first decade of the fifteenth century, ceased by the second. Is it possible that such attitudes towards female power and independence affected, and in part, lay behind the decline in lay bequests to nunneries (which after all comprised women living apart from mainstream society) and the seeming lack of interest in the female monastic vocation in the fifteenth century? Usually, but not exclusively, hospital sisters came from humbler social backgrounds than nuns, but one can speculate on how far an

initially well-respected and powerful group of hospital sisters and the nuns of a house that was neither large nor vastly prestigious were thought of as being so dissimilar in the minds of the laity.[64]

A difficulty with this theory—that is, that a decline in bequests to women religious by Bristol testators and the possible lack of enthusiasm for the religious life was related to those economic and social fluctuations which brought about changes in the lives of other individual and groups of women—is why it should have been peculiar to Bristol as a large urban centre. In other large cities such as York, research has indicated that as in Bristol, although with slight variations, fourteenth- and fifteenth-century nationwide economic and social trends were in evidence, affecting the position and life choices of women, and that there were also changes in the way charity and largesse were distributed to and received by women. However, in contrast to Bristol, testamentary bequests by the citizens to local female religious houses, particularly Clementhorpe in the suburbs, did not, apparently, decline; if anything, they increased.[65] It may also be noted that as regards Carrow, in the eastern suburbs of Norwich, the percentage of testators who gave to the nunnery rose, appearing to tail off only at the very end of the fifteenth century.[66] It is possible that the increasing or continuing popularity of these female religious houses as recipients of bequests was related to the fact that there was a more firmly-established noble and gentry presence within these cities than there was in Bristol in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and that their patronage of or interest in such institutions remained strong or at least fairly consistent. Throughout the centuries of its existence, Clementhorpe is known to have maintained a strong lay presence within its walls, having a number of noble and gentry women, widows and vowesses residing there along with the sisters. This is also true of Carrow in Norwich, where records show that members of the local gentry sent their daughters to board there, while a number of gentry widows also resided temporarily or permanently within

its precincts.[67]

Was it then the case that Bristol, like other large cities, experienced the same national economic and social trends and changes as elsewhere, but that characteristics peculiar to it meant that such trends and changes affected the attitudes of its citizens not only towards laywomen, as occurred in other large urban centres, but also women religious? Such characteristics can be defined as Bristol's social and economic make-up, principally that power and influence were vested in the hands of an increasingly socially inward-looking mercantile élite by the fifteenth century, few of whom seemed disposed towards the idea of allowing or encouraging their sons or daughters to pursue a religious vocation, coupled with the fact that the nunnery of St. Mary Magdalene within the city appears, by the fifteenth century, to have attracted little noble or gentry attention; if it had existed, it might have helped to maintain or raise the house's profile. However, more general work needs to be done on the relationship between urban laities and religious houses as it relates to the social and economic situation before firmer conclusions can be drawn. Taking the local region into account in this respect, it can be argued that Somerset and Gloucestershire provide a considerable contrast with other regions like Yorkshire and East Anglia. Research carried out on the latter has indicated that bequests to nunneries on the part of the laity were more numerous than those to male houses, reflecting the fact that they were 'firmly established in the communities of which they were a part'.[68] Only a small number of Somerset lay testators mentioned female religious houses between 1370-1499, the overall figure being just above 6 per cent, near the Bristol figure. It is also noticeable that, in common with Bristol, very few female wills contain bequests to nunneries, but those that do tend to date from the last decade of the fifteenth century rather than, as in Bristol, its beginning. The most popular house with testators was Buckland, followed by those of Cannington and Barrow, although altogether such bequests to these three

institutions made up only 3 per cent of all Somerset bequests to female religious houses. The Wiltshire nunneries of Lacock and Wilton received one apiece, while Amesbury was also mentioned a couple of times. St. Mary Magdalene in Bristol received just one bequest, while Shaftesbury in Dorset received a few more.[69] However, there appears to be no particular pattern detectable here, with the bequests being spread evenly over the fifteenth century, whereas the Bristol evidence indicates that bequests to local female houses began to decline by the second decade. It is true that Barrow was not mentioned by Somerset testators after 1411, which perhaps shows some correlation with the Bristol trend, but in view of the small number of bequests involved here this result should be treated with some caution. I have therefore been unable to find any of the similarities or patterns between bequests to women religious and bequests to other groups of women that I have found for Bristol. Andrew Brown's study of Salisbury diocese, which includes nearby Wiltshire, has found a gradual decline in bequests made to monastic houses during the fifteenth century, although he does not indicate whether his figures for bequests to the various types of religious orders include female ones as well as male. He does, however, indicate that support for nunneries from local gentry families remained constant throughout the period, which may have been due to the fact that the county possessed a number of female houses of high social standing.[70]

NOTES

1. The decline has been attested to by a number of historians, including locally, Nigel Saul, 'The Religious Sympathies of the Gentry in Gloucestershire 1200-1500', *TBGAS*, 98 (1980), pp. 99-112. Andrew Brown, *Popular Piety in Late Medieval England: the Diocese of Salisbury 1250-1550* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 26-48, sees a modest decline in the number of bequests left to monastic houses in the diocese of Salisbury, but notes that in some places this tendency was reversed, for in the city of Salisbury itself 'more testators, about 10 per cent, gave to the closed orders between 1500 and 1536 than before.' Furthermore, such trends in fifteenth-century piety as the interest shown by some members of the nobility in the spirituality of the Carthusians should also be borne in mind.

2. David Walker (ed.), *The Cartulary of St. Augustine's Abbey, Bristol*

(Bristol: Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaelogical Society, 1998), p. 312. It may be noted that these charters, dated 1233-40, mention that 'fratres et sorores' served there. For the St. Mark's references see Ross, *Cartulary of St. Mark's*, pp. 205-7. These charters also refer to 'brethren and sisters' attached to the institution although testamentary sources only ever mention women, who are referred to as nuns and not hospital sisters. See further Sally Thompson, *Women Religious: The Founding of English Nunneries after the Norman Conquest* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 45-6, where she suggests that the nunnery of St. Mary Magdalene may have once served in some capacity as a hospital or almshouse.

3. Neale, William Worcestre, pp. 86-7, 186-7.

4. *VCH Gloucestershire*, II, 1907, p. 93. The small size of the community was unusual for a city as large as Bristol and contrasts with other nunneries sited near or within large cities. Carrow, situated in the suburbs of Norwich, and Clementhorpe, situated similarly in York, were by no means large communities, but appear to have possessed, at any one time from the late fourteenth century to the Dissolution, more women religious than the Bristol house. Carrow saw its numbers fluctuate between 9-17, while Clementhorpe probably possessed between 13-15: see respectively Tanner, *Church in Late Medieval Norwich*, p. 123 and R. B. Dobson and Sara Donaghey (eds.), *The History of Clementhorpe Nunnery* (London: Council for British Archaeology, 1984), p. 14.

5. James Dallaway (ed.), *Antiquities of Bristow in the Middle Centuries; including the Topography by William Wyrcestre, and the Life of William Canynges* (Bristol: Mirror Office, 1834), p. 77, n. 5.

6. For the education of wealthy girls in nunneries see Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries c. 1275-1535* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 261-84.

7. Dallaway, *Antiquities of Bristol*, p. 77, n. 5.

8. A letter written by Richard Ryche to Cromwell in 1536 refers only to the fact that the nunnery's lands and property had been recently leased to one Wykes, but that Lady Jane Guildford was now desirous of it, while a 1538 entry in the Court of Augmentation records reveals that the lease was granted to her: see Brewer and Gairdner, *Letters, Foreign and Domestic*, XI, 129, XIII (i), 580. In the codicil to her will, PRO, PCC 21 Dyngeley (PROB 11/27), f. 164v, she left to Oliver Catesby 'my leasse of the Mawdelyns'. Is it possible that her wish to lease the nunnery's lands on its dissolution points towards an association with the female religious there, particularly as she resided at nearby St. Mark's in the 1530s?

9. *VCH Gloucestershire*, II, 93, where the name of the last prioress, who was appointed in 1520, is given as Eleanor Graunt.

10. Veale, *Great Red Book, Part II.*, pp. 188-91.

11. Great Orphan Book, f. 112v. By contrast, the extracts of lay testamentary bequests to the nunnery of Carrow cited in Walter Rye, *Carrow Abbey* (Norwich: privately printed, 1889), Appendix IX, pp. xiii-xxix, show that a number of testators left bequests other than money or items of a more personal nature to the nuns, although the recipients were usually relatives. Thus, it may be that the lack of such bequests by Bristol testators is a further indication of the fact that few, if any, women from the city's wealthy families became nuns at the house.

12. Dobson and Donaghey, *History of Clementhorpe*, p. 23, assert that the nunnery was 'particularly favoured by female testatrices'; see also John H. Tillotson, *Marrick Priory: A Nunnery in Late Medieval Yorkshire*, Borthwick Paper 75 (York: University of York, 1989), p. 13, where, based on testamentary evidence of gift-giving to female religious houses, it is suggested that 'the ladies of the Yorkshire gentry had a particular inclination in their bequests to support these houses and individual nuns with gifts'. Tanner, *Church in Late Medieval Norwich*, does not differentiate between male and

female bequests to nunneries, but it may be noted that of the 214 extracts of lay testamentary bequests to Carrow listed in Rye, *Carrow Abbey*, Appendix IX, pp. xiii-xxix, 41 per cent were left by women.

13. Strong, *All Saints' Calendar of Deeds*, p. 348. A later copy of the will, dated 1405, which contains a few minor alterations, can be found on pp. 352-3.

14. Great Orphan Book, f. 111r.

15. PRO, PCC 9 Marche (PROB 11/2a), f. 66v; Master, 'Some Gorges Wills', p. 243.

16. Bickley, *Little Red Book*, I, 2.

17. Burgess, *Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints'*, p. 13. The yearly accounts, p. 49, reveal that it was donated in 1411/12, twelve years before her death.

18. I. H. Jeays, *Descriptive Catalogue of the Charters and Muniments in the Possession of the Rt. Honourable Lord Fitzhardinge, at Berkeley Castle, compiled with Introduction, Notes and Indices* (Bristol: Jefferies, 1892), p. 187.

19. The names of the prioresses, taken mostly from references to be found in the registers of the bishops of Worcester, are listed in *VCH Gloucestershire*, II, 93.

20. For related discussion of the city's topographical layout and the siting of religious institutions see Chapter 2, pp. 80-1 above.

21. E. F. Jacob, *The Register of Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury 1414-1443*, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938), III, 123-4. The local gentry's overall lack of interest in the city's monastic houses provides some contrast with the patronage shown towards such institutions in other large urban centres by noble and gentry families who lived within the vicinity: see pp. 122-3 above.

22. Weaver, *Somerset Medieval Wills 1383-1500*, p. 183.

23. Tanner, *Church in Late Medieval Norwich*, p. 123.

24. Dobson and Donaghey, *History of Clementhorpe*, pp. 14, 16, 22. Neither the York or Norwich nunneries seem to have witnessed the same decline in bequests as that experienced by the Bristol nunnery after about 1420: see p. 122 above.

25. J. A. F. Thomson, 'Piety and Charity in Late Medieval London', JEH, 16 (1965), p. 189.

26. None of these houses were particularly prestigious or wealthy, although the house at Cannington, not far from either Bridgwater or Taunton, was possibly the most affluent of the three. The histories of these institutions, along with that of Barrow Gurney, can be found in Thomas Hugo, *The Medieval Nunneries of the County of Somerset* (London: Smith; Taunton: May, 1867).

27. In medieval times, the name of the house was spelt variously as Barwe, Barewe, Barugh or Barowe. A Jacobean mansion which was restored and added to in about 1875 stands on the site of the nunnery, of which nothing now remains. The church of St. Mary and St. Edward, which adjoined the nunnery on the south side and could be reached by the sisters via a connecting doorway, still stands, although it was much rebuilt towards the end of the nineteenth century: see Arthur C. Mee, *The King's England: North Somerset and Bristol* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1968), p. 16 and Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: North Somerset and Bristol* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958), pp. 87-8.

28. Hugo, *Medieval Nunneries of Somerset*, p. 5.

29. Great Orphan Book, f. 15r.

30. The full 'ordinatio' is printed in Veale, *Great Red Book. Part II.*, pp. 186-7.

31. For a list of prioresses see Hugo, *Medieval Nunneries of Somerset*, p. 51; of these women, only two, Joan Panys and Isabel Cogan, prioresses

respectively from 1377-1388 and 1502-1534, had surnames which can be found among Bristol testators or families listed in the civic records, although neither of them can be positively identified as belonging to these families.

32. Isabel may have been a member of the south Gloucestershire gentry family of Poleyn, some of whom are known to have engaged in criminal activity in the late 1300s: see Nigel Saul, *Knights and Esquires: The Gloucestershire Gentry in the Fourteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. 176-7, 249. She was a nun in the house from at least 1377 and may have been something of a character, as evidenced by a papal mandate which refers to her having left Barrow with another nun on account of the poor food, taking up residence at a Llandaff house: see W. H. Bliss and J. A. Twernion (eds.), *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers relating to Gt. Britain and Ireland. Papal Letters A.D. 1396-1404*, 18 vols (London: HMSO, 1893-1989), V, p. 162.

33. Great Orphan Book, respectively, ff. 127r, 203v.

34. See Chapter 5, pp. 179-83 below for John and Isabel Barstaple.

35. Great Orphan Book, f. 127r.

36. The Obit book, which still survives, is to be found in Cambridge University Library MS Dd viii 2. It consists of three parts, the first being the order for receiving those patrons and benefactors who desired to join the nunnery's confraternity, the second the order for receiving a nun, and the third the Calendar of Obits, which is printed in Rev. J. E. Jackson, 'Kington St. Michael, General History of the Parish', *WAM*, 4 (1858), pp. 36-128.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

38. Two women, Agnes Germand and her daughter Matilda, both of Bristol, are recorded as donating money rents to the nunnery, while John Tyke, also of Bristol, donated a house near Monkbridge prison: see K. H. Rogers (ed.), *Lacock Abbey Charters*, WRS 34 (1979), pp. 441, 443, 444. Whether these people were native Bristolians or originally from Wiltshire is impossible to tell.

39. Great Orphan Book, f. 69r.

40. *Ibid.*, f. 209r.

41. On Flemish nunneries see David Nicholas, *Medieval Flanders* (London and New York: Longman, 1992), p. 141. The beguinage at Dam is mentioned by Ernest McDonnell, *The Beguines and Beghards in Medieval Culture* (New York: Octagon Books, 1969), pp. 169, 215, 542, but very little information is given about the women, and whether they lived according to the rule of St. Augustine. This is possible, as McDonnell, p. 127, gives examples of other groups of beguines who professed to the Order of St. Augustine.

42. Great Orphan Book, f. 30r.

43. HWRO, Register of Bishop Wulstan Bransford, 1339-1349, II, f. 156v. The names of the nuns are not given in the printed calendar of the Bishop's register, although an account of the election is printed in T. R. Nash, *Collections for a History of Worcestershire*, 2 vols, (London: Bowyer Nichols, 1781-2), I, 217.

44. Great Orphan Book, f. 30r; see also Chapter 4, p. 134 below.

45. For information on Alice see Chapter 7, pp. 250-8 below.

46. See *ibid.*, pp. 261-4 below for discussion of Maud Baker's links with the Carthusians.

47. W. A. Sampson, *A History of the Bristol Grammar School* (Bristol: Arrowsmith; London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton and Kent, 1912), p. 45, where the Thorne pedigree can be found. Sampson's information comes from BL, MSS Harley 1041. Maud's name is not included in the 1540 pension list, so she had presumably died some years before: see Rev. W. L. Bowles and John Gough Nicholas, *Annals and Antiquities of Lacock Abbey, in the County of Wilts*. (London: Bowyer Nichols, 1885), p. 283.

48. Sylvia Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London, 1300-1500* (Michigan: University of Michigan, 1948; repr. Michigan: Arbour, 1962) p.

159; Barron 'Introduction', in Barron and Sutton, *Medieval London Widows*, p. xxvii.

49. See Dobson and Donaghey, *Clementhorpe nunnery*, pp. 14, 33; see also Jonathan Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries: Religion and Secular Life in Late Medieval Yorkshire* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1988), p. 49, where such women are discussed.

50. Tanner, *Church in Late Medieval Norwich*, p. 25.

51. Gilchrist and Oliva, *Religious Women in Medieval East Anglia*, p. 47. Oliva, in her more recent study, *The Convent and the Community in Late Medieval England: Female Monasteries in the Diocese of Norwich, 1350-1450* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1998), p. 57, gives the figure as 20 per cent.

52. See Chapter 4, pp. 151-3 below.

53. Saul, 'Religious Sympathies of the Gentry', p. 104, comments on the increasing tendency of some gentry families in the county to patronize and/or to specify burial in the local parish church by the fifteenth century as opposed to the fourteenth century, when many of them still asked to be buried in local monastic houses.

54. Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, p. 453, states that although Cannington was small and poor, 'its nuns were drawn from some of the best county families'. There is not a great deal of concrete evidence on which to base this assertion, although it may be noted that one pious laywoman of an eminent local family, Eleanor Hull née Malet (d. 1460), the fifteenth-century transcriber of religious texts, is known to have retired to Cannington, which suggests that the house was seen by the Somerset gentry as a suitable place for the women of their families to reside.

55. See Weaver, *Somerset Medieval Wills 1383-1500*, respectively, pp. 290-1, 343-4, 363-6.

56. Brown, *Popular Piety in Late Medieval England*, pp. 30-1. It strikes me that one reason for the possibly greater impulse of Wiltshire women to enter nunneries, or the willingness of their families to allow them to follow a religious life, may be partly explained by the fact that the county possessed two highly prestigious female houses, Wilton and Amesbury, while a third, Shaftesbury, was close to the west Wiltshire border. For Bristol and the nunnery at Lacock see p. 112 above.

57. For the financial difficulties faced by nunneries in the fifteenth century see Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, pp. 161-236.

58. See Chapter 1, pp. 26-30 above.

59. C. P. Hill, *The History of Bristol Grammar School* (London: Pitman, 1951), p. 1; see also *VCH Gloucestershire*, II, 362

60. Nicholas Orme and Margaret Webster, *The English Hospital 1070-1570* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 83.

61. See Chapter 5, pp. 187-97 below.

62. Warwick Paul Marett (ed.), *A Calendar of the Register of Henry Wakefield, Bishop of Worcester 1375-95*, WHS, New Series, 7 (1972), p. 54.

63. HWRO, Register of Bishop Thomas Peverall, 1407-17, f. 41v. A brief outline of the 1412 inquisition can be found in *VCH Gloucestershire*, II, 128.

64. See n. 2 above; see also J. Willis Bund (ed.), *Episcopal Registers. Diocese of Worcester. Register of Bishop Godfrey Gifford, Sept. 23rd 1269-August 15th 1301*, 2 vols, WHS (1972), II, 344, where an entry dated 1290 refers to 'the nuns and brethren of St. Bartholomew'.

65. See Dobson and Donaghey, *History of Clementhorpe*, p. 23, where it is stated that bequests to the nunnery 'were at their most numerous in the fifteenth century'. Although the list of testators given on p. 24 appears to bear this out, the number of those who gave as a percentage of all testators is not given, so that it is not clear from this by how much the percentage of bequests to York nunneries actually increased in the late medieval period.

66. Tanner, *Church in Late Medieval Norwich*, p. 223. However, the

percentage of bequests to nunneries in this study does show a slight variation, in that while bequests to Carrow increased in the mid-fifteenth century, bequests to East Anglian nunneries further afield slightly decreased and then stayed static. This bears some similarity to the Bristol pattern, where bequests to nunneries outside the city declined more quickly than those left to St. Mary Magdalene.

67. Dobson and Donaghey, *History of Clementhorpe*, p. 23; see also Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries*, p. 111. For Norwich see Rye, *Carrow Abbey*, pp. 48-52, where a list of all those who boarded at the nunnery can be found. Some of the gentry widows who resided there temporarily or permanently were extremely generous to the nunnery in their wills; see for example, the extract from the will of Elizabeth Yaxley (d. 1530), widow of John Yaxley of Mellis, pp. xxviii-xxix.

68. Gilchrist and Oliva, *Religious Women in Medieval East Anglia*, p. 61.

69. The lay wills used for these statistics are from Weaver, *Somerset Medieval Wills 1383-1500*, Maxwell-Lyte, *Bridgwater Borough Archives 1377-1468* and Dunning and Tremlett, *Bridgwater Borough Archives 1468-1485*.

70. Brown, *Popular Piety in Late Medieval England*, p. 20; see also n. 56 above.

CHAPTER 4

LAYWOMEN AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH MALE RELIGIOUS ORDERS AND THE SECULAR CLERGY

The male monastic presence was small in Bristol, but some pious individuals among the Bristol élite maintained links with the nearby Carthusian houses at Hinton and Witham near Frome, and the Cistercian abbey at Kingswood (two orders whose members practised a notoriously austere life-style), and these links are worth looking at. Apart from monks, the Augustinian canons of the Victorine Order were well-established in Bristol, having been founded there in the twelfth century by Robert Fitzharding, and three of the other five Victorine houses were situated in Somerset. Although the order of canons within the city does not seem to have impinged a great deal on the affections or lives of the citizens, some pious Bristol women are known to have had family connections with one or more of these houses. As well as the canons, all four orders of friars had a house in the city, and, as in other places, these proved more popular with the laity than the monastic or canonical orders. However, some of the mendicant orders attracted more attention and bequests than the others, or rose and fell in popularity, while preferences for different houses can be detected between men and women, and these aspects are looked at in some detail. Finally, I have included a section on the relationship of the laity with the city's secular clergy. There is more evidence for this towards the end of the period, and, although it may be that in this respect, Bristol did not differ a great deal from other places, material survives, particularly within the All Saints' archive, which throws light on the relationship of some female parishioners with their parish priests, and the way in which this may have affected their relationships with family and the wider community.

Male Religious Orders: Monks

A study of Great Orphan and Great Red Book testators shows a clear decline

in the number of bequests left to male monastic houses over the course of the fifteenth century. From a high point of 14.6 per cent between 1375-1399 it had fallen to 4.2 per cent between 1475-1499. There was a small monastic house in the city in the form of the Benedictine priory of St. James near the Horsefair, which had been founded by Robert, earl of Gloucester, in the twelfth century as a cell of Tewkesbury Abbey. It consisted of a prior, chosen by the Abbot of Tewkesbury and no more than two or three monks at any one time. The priory was unusual in that it doubled as a parish church, with the Prior and convent of Tewkesbury possessing 'the right of sending a monk to serve the parishioners or of appointing a chaplain'.[1] Thus most bequests left by the Bristol laity to the priory, which, incidentally, comprised the vast majority of bequests made to male monastic houses, were from the parishioners of St. James for tithes unpaid, as in the 1468 will of Tangela á Clonne, who left 2s to the 'priori domus et ecclesie Sancti Jacobi antedicte pro decimis et oblacionibus meis oblitis et eciam vt orat pro anima mea'.[2] Such bequests do not, therefore, necessarily reveal any personal attachment towards the house as a monastic establishment or for the particular brand of monasticism espoused by its inhabitants, although one parishioner, John Pedewell, in 1385, left money to the prior and each of the other monks, naming them individually, which may suggest a more personal allegiance on his part.[3] Apart from the parishioners of St. James, a few other late-fourteenth-century testators mentioned the priory in their wills. Henry Calf of St. Werburgh's parish, for example, left 60s to the prior and monks of St. James of Bristol 'ad vitrandum vitream fenestram in ecclesia ibidem' [for the glazing of a window in the church there].[4] However, such bequests to the priory were declining by the second quarter of the fifteenth century.

Bequests to monastic houses outside of Bristol were few, comprising only a small percentage, and it is thus difficult to use them as a basis for quantitative research or as a means of disclosing whether they grew or declined much in

popularity; but it is of interest to note that it was the male religious houses of Somerset which were favoured rather than those of Gloucestershire, even by those who lived in one of the parishes that lay on the Gloucestershire side of the river, which comprised the majority of testators.[5] The nearer proximity of some of the Somerset houses to the city may have been a factor in the pattern of bequests although it cannot have been the only one. The two Carthusian houses in Somerset were sited at roughly the same distance from Bristol as the Cistercian abbey of Kingswood in south Gloucestershire, yet the latter received far fewer bequests. The houses at Hinton and Witham were the first two to be founded by the Carthusian order in England and lay to the south-east of Bristol, the former at a distance of about eighteen miles and the latter, sited near Selwood forest and sometimes referred to by that name, at about twenty-five. Despite the small number of overall bequests made to male monastic houses outside the city, it is evident that these two were more popular with the Bristol laity than other houses.[6] The order was an austere one whose members lived a solitary existence in separate cells around a courtyard, only meeting together in their church or chapter house for prayer. Although the Carthusians had not managed to establish as many houses as the Benedictine and Cistercian orders in England, their commitment to the contemplative life and their form of meditative piety had aroused the admiration and influenced the devotional lives and activities of many lay people, while, amongst the fifteenth-century nobility in particular, there is much evidence of interest in writings composed by members of the order and in Carthusian-related texts.[7]

In Bristol, a few of the wealthiest and most prominent Bristolians mentioned the monks of Hinton and Witham in their wills-including John Stoke, who in 1381 left 40s to the Witham convent, and William Chedder, who in the following year left 100s to the same house to pray for his soul.[8] The latter had already, in 1375, with his brother Robert, founded a perpetual chantry in

Cheddar church, for which tenements and lands were made over to the Prior of the convent of Witham, who was to find a suitable priest to celebrate for the health of Robert and William, their family and friends, and for their souls when they should leave this life.[9] Others also founded perpetual chantries within one or other of the two houses. In 1369, William Canynges the elder left five messuages and four shops worth £4 yearly to maintain a chaplain to say prayers for him, his wife and his relatives and friends within the monk's church at Witham.[10] A few asked for interment in one or other of the two houses. Roger Taunton, for instance, specified in his 1383 will that he wished to be buried 'in ecclesia de Chart Hous de Henton', leaving £10 for that purpose.[11] Bequests by wealthy Bristolians to the Carthusians declined after the early years of the fifteenth century, although they were still mentioned in wills up to the 1490s.[12] Only two women left bequests to any of the male monastic houses outside of the city, thereby providing a distinct contrast with the large number who mentioned the mendicant orders. It may be significant that they both left to the Carthusian houses, for in the fifteenth century the order counted among its most prominent admirers and benefactors a number of devout, high-born women.[13] However, the sum of 13s 4d left by Elen Candevere to the 'monachis de Henton' was matched by the amount she left to the 'monachis de Farlegh', the latter bequest referring to the Cluniac settlement at Monkton Farleigh near Bradford-on-Avon in west Wiltshire, founded by a member of the De Bohun family in the first half of the twelfth century. Elen's will suggests that she was originally from the Bradford-on Avon area, which may explain her preferences for the two monastic houses mentioned therein. Maud Baker's remembrance of the two local Carthusian establishments appears to have been intrinsic to her piety and is discussed in more detail elsewhere.[14]

Apart from the Carthusians, there were only a very few bequests to other monasteries in Somerset. In 1381, John Stoke left 20s to 'venerabili viro,

Abbati Glaston', 13s 4d to the 'priori' and 6s 8d to 'cuilibet monacho dicti loci' so that they might pray for his soul. It may also be noted that the provisions of the chantry founded by him in the church of St. Thomas included instructions for prayers to be said for 'Andree Bremcote, nuper monacho Glaston', for 'Waltero Monynton, nuper Abbati Glaston' and 'Thome White, nuper monacho ibidem' all of which suggest that he knew personally a number of the monastery's inhabitants.[15] Although John Pedewell in his will of 1385 did not leave a bequest to the abbey, he mentioned 'Walterius, filius meus, monachus Glaston', one of the very few references that I have found of a Bristol man having belonged to one of the monastic orders.[16] Indeed, even fewer members of the male than of the female laity appear to have entered upon such a vocation.[17]

The other Benedictine houses of Muchelney and Athelney, the Cistercian abbey of Cleeve and the Cluniac priory at Montacute, all further south in Somerset, did not excite much concern among the Bristol laity. The Cistercian abbey of St. Mary at Kingswood near Wotton-under-Edge was the most popular of the Gloucestershire houses, but was only mentioned by a few testators. Elias Spelly, whose family's particular regard for the Cistercian order has already been discussed, was the most generous. He requested burial there and left £20 to the 'Abbati et couentui de Kyngeswode' and 6s 8d 'cuilibet monacho in eadem ecclesia'.[18] However, sums of money left by other testators were more than nominal. In 1397, for example, Reginald Taillour left 100s to the 'Abbati de Kyngeswode and conuentui euisdem loci' to pray for his soul.[19] Yet bequests to the abbey appear to have dried up by the beginning of the fifteenth century. There were no male monastic houses in Wiltshire, apart from the small Cluniac monastery of Monkton Farleigh, and the Dorset monasteries were mentioned by only one testator.[20]

As was the case with nunneries, it is noticeable that the majority of bequests date from the late fourteenth century, with the percentage declining over the

fifteenth. Similar research carried out for other large cities such as London, Norwich and, to an extent, York indicates that the number of lay people donating to male monastic communities, although never large, appears to have remained steadier or even static.[21] However, this may have been because they possessed within them large monastic houses, whereas Bristol had only the tiny Benedictine priory of St. James, the larger local houses lying outside of the city. In the previous chapter on nunneries, I have argued that in the late fourteenth century more members of the Bristol élite had family links with places that lay outside, but within a twenty mile radius of, the city than did those living later in the fifteenth century. That is to say, they may have been first- or second- generation émigrés having dual ties to their place of origin and to Bristol, while later generations may have felt themselves to be more firmly rooted in the urban community; thus the decline in bequests to female religious houses outside the city, particularly the house at Barrow Gurney, may have occurred because the fifteenth-century laity felt a less strong allegiance to such institutions than their predecessors. It is likely that this, in part, also lay behind the decline in bequests to male monastic houses beyond the city boundaries, although it should be reiterated that the number of such bequests was, anyway, very small, making it difficult to draw firm conclusions on the matter. Using the Somerset lay wills transcribed by Weaver as a comparison with those made by the Bristol laity, it is evident that bequests to male monastic houses comprised a higher percentage, varying between 10 to 15 per cent between 1375-1474, only declining in the last quarter of the fifteenth century to just above 6 per cent. As was the case with Bristol, the number of bequests left by Somerset female testators to male monastic establishments were few, but it is of interest to note that most of them date from the second half of the fifteenth century. All the bequests except one, however, were to monasteries sited within or near to the town or village where each individual woman lived; thus it may well have been local ties rather than a

draw to a particular brand of monastic piety which lay behind them.

Male Religious Orders: Canons

Orders of regular canons had originally grown up as communities of priests or clerics attached to abbeys or cathedrals, although as time went by individual houses were also founded in more isolated areas. Most of them followed the Rule of St. Augustine of Hippo, first set down in the fifth century, and although they took vows of chastity, renounced private property and lived a communal life, their vocation had a more pastoral side to it than that of the monastic orders and they were required to preach and to administer to the laity in those churches in the possession of their communities. Within Bristol, a house of canons was attached to the abbey of St. Augustine, while further houses were to be found at Barlynch, Bruton, Keynsham, Stavordale, Taunton, and Woodspring in Somerset, and at Cirencester, Gloucester, Horsley and Llanthony in Gloucestershire. Again, as was the case with the monastic houses, it may be noted that the Bristol laity tended to have stronger links with the Somerset rather than the Gloucestershire houses, regardless of whether they resided on the north or south side of the river Avon. The Bristol house, along with the houses at Keynsham, four miles south-east of the city, Woodspring near Weston-super-Mare, and Stavordale, sited near the Wiltshire border five miles to the south of the Carthusian priory of Witham, belonged to the Victorine order, a branch modelling itself on the abbey of St. Victor in Paris, which had adopted a stricter, more austere observance of the Augustinian Rule.

The abbey of St. Augustine in Bristol, sited on College Green to the south-west of the central city parishes where the mass of the population lived, was founded in 1140 by Robert FitzHarding and continued to be patronized by members of the Berkeley family well into the fourteenth century, a number of them requesting burial there.[22] Little is known of the day-to-day running of

the community although records of episcopal visitations reveal complaints of laxness, idleness and even misbehaviour in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Its relationship with the brethren of St. Mark's Hospital which also bordered College Green was a difficult one because of long-running feuds over the rights of both parties to various properties and lands, particularly over the green that divided them.[23] Nor were relationships with the citizenry always easy, the abbey's situation set slightly apart from the central parishes contributing, perhaps, to a lack of rapport or closeness between the two communities.[24] A number of petty disputes also arose with the Mayor and Commonalty, culminating in the quarrel recorded in the Great White Book in the 1490s over the abbey's right of sanctuary.[25]

Existing abbey accounts show the meagreness of the oblations made to the abbey in 1492 and 1512, thereby suggesting that it did not attract a great deal of attention or patronage from the local urban community, although, as Beachcroft and Sabin point out, the 1539 Certificate of Surrender refers to '526 oz of silver plate reserved to the King's use and over £103-worth of "ornamentes Goodes and Cattalles" sold for his profit', together with other precious stones and richly-woven vestments, which they suggest testify to 'the munificence of the abbey patrons'.[26] However, these may well have been clerical or aristocratic patrons. Certainly, the perpetual chantries known to have been established in the abbey had been founded by members of the clergy and noble families rather than the urban laity.[27] The number of bequests made by the Bristol laity to the orders of canons was never great, a study of wills in the Great Orphan and Great Red Books revealing it to have been less than 5 per cent overall between 1375-1499. Bequests left to the abbey and/or the canonical community were usually small sums of money, no more than 2s, although in some wills, mostly in those dating from before 1400, greater generosity can be found. In 1394, for instance, Henry Calf left 40s, more than the usual nominal sum, to the Abbot and convent of St. Augustine of

Bristol 'ad opus campanilis ibidem' [to the work of the bell-tower there].[28] Some testators mentioned individual canons in their wills, as did John Fisscher who, in 1434, left the substantial sum of £20 to 'Domino Ricardo Luttleton, canonico regulari priori monasterii Sancti Augustini, Bristollie' [Sir Richard Luttleton, canon regular and prior of the monastery of St. Augustine, Bristol] to pray for his soul.[29] A few wills reveal that some of the Bristol laity had family members who belonged to the canonical community. In 1378, Robert Brown mentioned 'Sir Walter Derby, canon of the monastery of S. Augustine', this man presumably being a relative of the great wine merchant of the same name, although he is not mentioned in that man's will.[30] In 1473, William Codder left to 'Willelmo Hoton, canonico monasterii Sancti Augustini', while in 1474, William Hutton, merchant, left to the same man, whom he referred to as 'filio meo' [my son], the sum of 5 marks and 'vnum ciphum argenteum stantem cum coopertorio, vnam saltcellar coopertorio de argento' [a standing silver cup with a cover, a saltcellar with a cover of silver]. It is likely that these men were related to Maud Baker's first husband, John Hutton, for in the will of the elder William Hutton, Maud's father, William Woddington, is named as executor.[31]

The abbey was very rarely mentioned by women, but an interesting early entry can be found in its cartulary which covers the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, regarding a corrody granted to one Mary Curtilone. Two charters, dated 1254, record the agreement made between her and the abbey whereby she gave to it various properties and lands in Bristol and Winchester. In return for this, she was to be allowed to live in one of the donated properties paying to the abbey 1d a year for the rest of her life and to receive 'de cellario Sancti Augustini unam michiam canonicalem et unam mesuram cervise canonicalis, et de coquina unum ferculum cum una pitancia et potagium si voluerit' [from the cellar of St. Augustine, a small loaf and a measure of ale, and from the kitchen, a dish/plate with an allowance (of food) and drink if she

wishes]. She was also to have weekly 'unam summam busce ad focum suum, et singulis annis dimidiam marcam argenti in Nativitate domini ad robam suam' [an amount of wood for her fire, and every year, half a mark of silver on the Lord's Day for her clothing].[32] There are no later references to any woman independently making similar arrangements with the abbey, although in his will of 1412 Richard Spaldyng left to his wife, Margaret, 'totum statum meum quem habeo in toto illo corrodio quod nuper emi de Johanne Hastyng de Redyng exeunti de monasterio Sancti Augustini, Bristollie perquirato per eundem Johanem Hastyng ad terminum vite sue' [all my claim which I have in that corrody that I once bought of John Hastyng of Reading, coming from the monastery of St. Augustine, Bristol, purchased/acquired by the same John for the term of his life].[33] Thus, it seems that women corrodians at the abbey were not unknown throughout the period. However, the surviving account rolls of 1492 and 1512 mention only the expenses relating to the corrodies of Edward John and John Thloide (Lloyd) granted at the demand of the Crown.[34] Only three women mentioned the abbey in their wills, including Margery Wales who asked to be buried there and left 2s 'in glasco pulsando' [for the ringing of bells], but, as previously suggested, this may well have been related to the fact that her husband was one of the chief masons overseeing work carried out within the abbey.[35] Agnes Spelly, in 1393, left to the 'Abbati Beati Augustini Bristoll, lauacrum negrum quod pendet in aula mea' [the Abbot of the Blessed Augustine, Bristol, a black ewer which hangs in my hall].[36] Agnes also left detailed instructions in her will to the hermit of the chapel of St. Jordan on College Green (which stood in front of the abbey and was maintained by the canons) for the safe-keeping of a cup intended for a female friend, which further suggests that she may have had close links with the canonical community. The bequest of 6s 8d left by Elizabeth Cornwell, the Shropshire gentlewoman who lived out her final years and died in Bristol, is of interest, as we know that she patronized and probably resided at St. Mark's hospital, with

whom the abbey was often in dispute.[37] Indeed, it is noteworthy that most of those who left to the one institution usually left to the other even when they were not of St. Augustine's parish. Clearly, the disharmony and rivalry that existed from time to time between the two institutions did not affect the support that they received from individual lay residents and patrons.

The other Victorine abbeys at nearby Keynsham and Woodspring barely feature in the wills of Bristol testators, although an entry in the late-fourteenth-century Patent Rolls records the perpetual chantry founded at the latter house by Walter Derby, Elias Spelly and Thomas Beaupyne, three eminent Bristol men, even though the house was not mentioned by any of them in their respective wills.[38] Neither of these two Victorine houses attracted bequests from women, but the small non-Victorine house of Barlinch, sited in an isolated spot upon Exmoor in south-west Somerset and which generally went unnoticed by the Bristol laity, had an important connection with one eminent and pious Bristol widow, Alice Chester, whose son served as prior there in the 1480s. Although some aspects of Alice's life have been mentioned briefly by others, most notably Clive Burgess, regarding the foundation of chantries in All Saints' church, and Peter Fleming, in relation to her involvement with mercantile activities, none have commented on her link with the priory.[39] In a sense, this is not surprising, as extant records relating to the small Somerset house of canons are sparse. Yet in her will Alice remitted to 'Magistro Johanni Chestre, canonico, filio meo, Priori de Bereleynch' a debt of £100, as well as bequeathing to him 'meam optimam peluim cum suo lavacro argento et in parte deaurato' [my best basin with silver ewer, in part gilt] weighing 70 ounces.[40] There is some confusion surrounding this John Chester, as Alice also had another son called John, a merchant to whom she bequeathed various goods and lands in her will, and who was mentioned in the All Saints' church book as encouraging his mother's pious munificence to that institution. By a coincidence, both John Chesters died in 1488. It is not clear

why the two men shared the same Christian name, although the practice of giving different children in one family the same name was not unknown in medieval times.[41] There are a number of other possibilities which may explain the mystery. John Chester, the prior, may have been a son from a previous marriage of her husband Henry, or a relative that she and her husband had brought up. He may have been a godson, although in her will he was not referred to as 'filiolus'. John Chester the merchant was mentioned in Henry's will, but John Chester the canon was not. However, both men were named in the 1478 will of Thomas Rowley, a kinsman of Alice. To 'Magistro Johanni Chester' Rowley left £5 'ad orandum pro anima mea' while separately to 'Johanni Chester, consanguineo meo' [my kinsman] he left 'vnam pipam gaude et due doleos seruise' [a pipe of woad and two casks/tuns of ale].[42] Apart from the references in these wills, there is very little other information to be found on Prior John Chester. A brief reference in a British museum manuscript records only that he was prior of Barlinch and that he died in 1488, although he may have been the John Chester whom Emden finds as having graduated in 1459, becoming an Augustinian canon at Taunton priory and holding various benefices afterwards.[43]

Male Religious Orders: Friars

Not all late-medieval towns and cities had a monastery or nunnery within their confines, but the majority of those ranging from middling to large size possessed one or more houses of friars. This was not surprising, for in many ways the towns had been the *raison d'etre* of the friaries. The mendicant orders in Western Europe had grown out of late twelfth- and thirteenth-century religious trends and developments aiming to combat the spread of what were deemed to be heretical movements. By going out and preaching with zest and conviction to the growing centres of population, as had many of the leaders of the heretical sects, the friars aimed to breathe a new vitality into

the church's relationship with the laity, while at the same time ensuring people remained within the orthodox fold. These were the circumstances out of which first the Dominicans and then the Franciscans, with their greater emphasis on poverty, evolved, although the origins of the Carmelite and Austin friars are more obscure. The former had originally consisted of hermits living on the slopes of Mount Carmel in the Holy Land, who only began to show organizational form towards the end of the twelfth century. Compelled to spread outwards into Europe with the fall of the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem, it was not until 1247 that they officially became a mendicant order. Thus, although many of its members engaged in much preaching and pastoral work, it remained the order of friars most characterized by an attachment to the contemplative and eremitic life. The Austin friars similarly grew out of groups or orders of hermits, being formally constituted as a mendicant order in 1256. Like the Carmelites, they also gradually moved out from hermitages into towns.[44] Although by the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries much of the early vigour and vitality of the orders may have receded, in the urban centres which they had originally sought out and settled in they generally continued to assume a larger profile in the religious consciousness of the inhabitants than did the monastic orders, although this is not to suggest that support of the mendicants was exclusive to townspeople.

Within Bristol, four houses were founded, although a fifth, the Friars of the Sack, an order suppressed in 1274 by conciliar decree, was also established there briefly, being last mentioned in 1322.[45] The Dominican house, founded by Maurice de Gaunt in 1227/8, stood in Broadmead and comprised a substantial set of buildings, including a church and two spacious halls, as well as various domestic buildings and a large cemetery.[46] In one of the friary halls, the Baker's guild met to worship at the altar of St. Clement, thereby pointing to the strong association of at least one craft fraternity with the city's religious houses.[47] Very little is known of the origins of the Friars Minor

whose house stood in Lewin's Mead on the banks of the river Frome, although it was probably founded before 1234.[48]

The house of the Carmelites is thought to have been founded by Edward I in about 1267 before he became king, and stood on the site of the present-day Colston Hall.[49] According to medieval and early modern topographers, it was a building of some distinction: William Worcester, writing of it in his itinerary of around 1480, referred to the magnificent 'Turris & spera. siue le broche. Ecclesie Carmelitarum de fratribus Carmelitarum Bristollie' [tower and spire or steeple of the Carmelites' church, of the Carmelite friars of Bristol], which was 200 feet high, making it one of the tallest structures in the city. He also mentioned the statue of St. Mary which was set 'in tabernaculo muri fratrum' [in a shrine in the walls of the friary].[50] The Austin friary, according to Leland, stood 'harde by the Temple Gate within it Northe Weste', while Worcester describes the eastern part of the chancel as being 'upon the banks of the river Avon.'[51] It was founded in 1313 by Simon de Montacute, earl of Salisbury, who donated 100 square feet of land by the Temple gate of the town for its construction, and was further patronized in the early fourteenth century by members of the Berkeley family.[52] On its later history there is little information, but it may have attained a certain popularity with other local gentry families in the fourteenth century, for a document in the Bodleian library details the shields of fifty-five Gloucestershire and Somerset knights, painted around 1400, that hung inside the friary church.[53] However, as far as the urban laity was concerned, although it was mentioned more frequently in late-fourteenth-century wills than those of a later period, it remained the most obscure of the Bristol friaries, perhaps because its position was less central and thus more isolated from the main body of population than the other three.

There is no doubt that the four friaries were popular with the city's inhabitants. All kinds of bequests were left by the laity to the friars, ranging

from small sums of money for their prayers to much larger donations towards the fabric of the friary buildings, often accompanied by the setting-up of elaborate chantry foundations within their churches. Frequent requests were made for burial in one or other of the friary churches or for the presence of members of one or all of the orders at a testator's funeral.[54] However, although they were mentioned far more frequently than the more enclosed monastic orders throughout the period, it is evident that their popularity too declined. A study of testators in the Great Orphan and Great Red Books shows that, while two thirds of testators gave to one or more of the four houses between 1375-1399, by the period 1475-1499 this had fallen to just below a quarter. The decline has also been noted by Martha Skeeters, who argues that it may have occurred because of the differing developing ideologies of the mendicant movement and the mercantile community in the late fifteenth century. The latter, she suggests, encouraged competitiveness rather than 'communal co-operation and the holiness of poverty' as represented by the friars. She goes on to propose that such a development may have lain behind the apparent lack of resistance by the townsfolk to the closure of the friaries in the 1530s.[55] This again emphasizes Bristol's reliance on trade for its growth and viability, linking up with arguments I have outlined earlier, namely that the city's principal importance as a centre of trade and mercantile activity substantially affected the nature of its inhabitants' religious life.[56] Further, such a trend does provide a contrast with that which occurred in other large towns. While the fall in bequests to the friaries had become evident in Bristol by 1450, in Norwich, according to Norman Tanner's research, this does not seem to have occurred until the second decade of the sixteenth century, while Thomson, writing of London, suggests that the popularity of the friars actually increased towards the time of the Reformation, something also found by Palliser in his study of pre-Reformation York.[57] It is difficult to compare the Bristol figures with those of other local urban centres within Somerset and

Gloucestershire, partly because few of the smaller towns possessed mendicant houses. About half of the surviving wills of Bridgwater testators include a bequest to one or other of the town's friaries throughout the period and there is little evidence of a decline, although it is necessary to point out that the wills only comprise a small number.[58] Some of the Somerset testators mentioned the Bristol friaries in their wills, including, most notably, the Chocke family of nearby Long Ashton, but not enough bequests were left by local gentry families to be able to establish a pattern. The city of Gloucester possessed Dominican, Franciscan and Carmelite houses, which indicates that their influence within the city was fairly substantial, and it has been asserted that legacies 'to all three orders of friars in Gloucester were a regular item in the wills of burgesses of the 15th century and early 16th, where significantly the larger religious houses were very rarely mentioned'. Yet no comment is made on whether there was any sort of decline.[59] Nigel Saul, writing about the religious sympathies of the Gloucestershire gentry, asserts that right until the end of the Middle Ages, the friars continued to enjoy the favour of families from this social group.[60] However, in both cases, it seems that the number of wills in question is not large. The percentages quoted by Andrew Brown for the city of Salisbury in nearby Wiltshire reveal a rise in bequests to the city's two friaries in the second half of the fifteenth century followed by a decline, but one which was less steep than that which occurred in Bristol.[61]

Although there is no doubt that overall the percentage of bequests made to the Bristol friaries fell, it is worth looking briefly both at possible differences or, indeed, similarities that exist between the pattern of male and female bequests and the changing fortunes and popularity of the individual orders, as these seem to have varied slightly. From the wills in the Great Orphan and Great Red Books it can be seen that male bequests to the friaries declined from 65.8 per cent between 1375-1399 to 54.2 per cent between 1400-24. Although this figure remained steady at 52.4 per cent between 1425-1449,

between 1450-1474 it fell to 33.3 per cent, declining even further to 23.6 per cent in the last quarter of the fifteenth century. The majority of male testators who mentioned or left money to the friaries left sums to all four houses, these usually being modest amounts ranging from a few pence to a few shillings, although some requested burial in a particular house. Between 1375-1399, the Dominicans and Carmelites were the two orders mentioned the most often in wills and deeds, with the Franciscans not far behind. In the late fourteenth century, the name of John Derneford, a friar of the Dominican order, occurs fairly frequently in the wills of male testators, but I have been unable to uncover any information on his life or background, and the bequests left to him throw no further light on his relationship with those men who singled him out.[62] Yet clearly Derneford was a prominent and respected member of the mendicant community in Bristol. Between 1400-1424, there were fewer bequests left to the Dominicans and to the Franciscans, although support for the two orders did not completely die away.[63] As late as 1465, so prominent a citizen as William Canynges donated £20 to the Franciscans in return for which they recorded that 'we have promised and granted to the said William Canynges and Joanna his wife that their names be inscribed in the gift book (datario) of our Convent among the chief benefactors of the said Convent, and that they be recommended as the custom is'.[64] However, from 1400, a clear decline can be seen in the number of requests for burial in both houses.

The same period also saw an increase in the number of male testators specifically singling out the Carmelites, who received more in grants and bequests of property than the others. In particular, there was an increased desire for burial in their house, something which applied to both male and female testators. The bequests left were usually in excess of 40s and in some cases went far beyond this. John Sutton, for example, in his 1415 will, asked to be buried 'in ecclesia fratrum Carmelitarum' and left property to the prior

and convent who were to sell it and use the money raised from it 'circa domum predictum' [about the said house] with the proviso that the brothers would pray for the testator's soul and the souls of all the faithful dead.[65] Although bequests to the Carmelites also declined after 1425, they continued to be singled out from the other three orders throughout the fifteenth century. Furthermore, it was not just the Carmelite house at Bristol that was mentioned by the laity. In 1473, for example, the Bristol merchant, William Coder, not only left 20s to the Carmelite house in his native city but also to 'fratribus beate et gloriose virginis Marie de Monte Carmeli de Ludlowe predicte ad orandum pro anima mea et ad celebrandum deuote exequias et missam post obitum meum' [to the friars of the blessed and glorious virgin Mary of Mount Carmel of Ludlowe aforesaid to pray for my soul and devoutly celebrate the funeral offices and mass after my death], while in 1478, the merchant William Rowley, who died in Dam, Flanders, asked to be buried 'in capella Sancti Georgii infra ecclesiam fratrum Carmelitarum apud Burdaux' [in the chapel of St. George in the church of the Carmelite friars near Bordeaux].[66] Such bequests therefore suggest that the attachment of some medieval Bristolians to the order did not stem merely from the fact that the Carmelite building within the city was the grandest and most prestigious of the mendicant houses there, but because the particular brand of piety espoused by them had, in some ways, strongly infused the piety of the Bristol lay élite. In a sense, the popularity of the Carmelites, the most contemplative and eremitically-inclined of the mendicant orders, within Bristol, is perhaps surprising in light of the fact that few wealthy members of the urban laity are known to have withdrawn from the urban community in order to follow either the monastic or the solitary contemplative life. Is it possible that the preference shown for the order (and this may also explain the support shown for the nearby Carthusian houses),was indicative of the way in which such pious or spiritual impulses among the Bristol laity found an outlet? There is certainly little evidence, despite their

popularity, to suggest that many sons or male relatives of wealthy Bristol families joined the Carmelites or any of the other orders of mendicants. In 1398, Thomas Graunt asked to be buried in the church of the Bristol Carmelites, specifying that 'omnes exequias meas fiant et compleant secundum ordinationem meorum executorum, videlicet fratris Johanne Graunt, filii mei, et Elene, vxoris mee' [all my funeral rites are to be made and completed according to the arrangement of my executors, namely, friar John Graunt, my son, and Elene, my wife], which suggests that John may have belonged to that order.[67] The brother of Joan Halleway the younger appears to have been a friar, and in the 1397 will of John Freman a legacy of 6s 8d was left to 'fratri Thome, filio meo', but in neither case is it indicated which order the men belonged to.[68]

Turning now to women, there is less evidence of a steady overall decline in the percentage of bequests, although it needs to be remembered that the survival rates for female wills in Bristol appear to have been subject to greater fluctuations than that for male wills, which may have a bearing on the figures. Using the wills in the Great Orphan and Great Red Books as a basis for quantitative research, it is evident that between 1375-1399 the percentage of women leaving bequests to the friaries stood at 28.5, a figure that rose between 1400-1424 to 46.2. For the period between 1425-1449 there are unfortunately no female wills recorded in the abovementioned sources, but between 1450-1474 the number of female testamentary bequests to the friaries had fallen to 33 per cent, the same as for men. However, the last quarter of the fifteenth century saw the figure rise again to 50 per cent. Thus it is possible that the friaries retained a higher level of popularity with women. It is difficult to account for why this may have been the case, for, as far as I have been able to establish, little general research has been done on female relationships with the mendicant orders, and, where this has been broached, the results are not conclusive. Veronica Sekules has argued in an article on

female piety and patronage that the friars 'seem to have been especially adept at persuading wealthy and pious women to build or decorate their churches and to provide them generously with alms', although Robert A. Wood in his article on 'poor' London widows states that only four out of forty-nine, that is, less than 10 per cent, left to friaries.[69] It is true, of course, that the friars, because of the nature of their calling, could move more freely within and among the urban community than could the enclosed communities, therefore comprising the religious orders with whom women were most likely to come into contact, particularly as the latter's own freedom to come and go as they pleased was more restricted than that of men. Perhaps too, women, living less at the forefront of the world of commerce and mercantilism than their male counterparts, were less affected by developing ideologies related to that world, ideologies which, it has been argued, may by the end of the fifteenth century have begun to conflict with those held by the mendicant orders.

Overall, it is evident that women were less likely to state a preference for a particular order than were men. Only two of the bequests left specifically to the Dominicans were by women, surprising perhaps in view of the fact that the Dominican friary is known to have housed an anchoress within its precincts towards the end of the fifteenth century, if not before, and can therefore be said to have been sympathetic to those forms of female pious aspiration or spirituality which required separation from the secular community.[70] Similarly, only one women, Joan Kempson in 1479, mentioned the house of the Austin friars at Bristol, leaving to them '1 cortell'.[71] The nature of Joan's links with the house is unclear. The bequest may indicate a personal preference on her part, but it may also be noted that, as she was a resident of Temple parish, the friary was in closer proximity to her than the other three. The house was not mentioned in her husband's will. A few women mentioned the Franciscans and, indeed, one of the earliest-known examples of urban lay patronage of the house was a grant of land given by Joan de Lidiard (whose

husband had served as mayor in 1277), on which the friary was able to construct for itself one of Bristol's earliest and most efficient water supplies.[72] Yet it seems that, where female testators showed a preference for a particular mendicant order, as was the case with male testators, it was most likely to be the Carmelites. Usually, this involved a request for burial in the Carmelite church, although quite often it appears that deceased members of the women's own blood kin were already buried there. Margaret Gloucester, who was unmarried when she made her will in 1420, asked to be buried 'inter fratres Carmelitarum iuxta tumulum predicti nuper patris mei' [among the friars of the Carmelites, next to the tomb of my aforesaid late father], while Joan, widow of John Ford, left £5 to the friary 'ubi corpora parentum meorum sepulta sunt' [where the bodies of my parents are buried] with the proviso that she, her husband and her parents were especially named among the other benefactors 'in pulpito predicto tempore eciam missarum et diuinorum' [in the said pulpit at the time of the masses and divine services].[73] It is of interest to note that although she asked for the name of her spouse to be inscribed on the bede roll, it was beside her parents that she wished to be buried and not beside him.[74] There is evidence that some women had a personal attachment to individual Carmelite friars. Felicia Holeway, for example, left 6s 8d to 'fabrice ecclesie fratrum Carmelitarum, Bristoll' but the larger sum of 20s to 'fratri Johanni Camylle' of the same order.[75] Another Bristol link that springs to mind is that of Jane Barr, a relative of Elizabeth Cornwell, the Shropshire gentlewoman residing at the hospital of the Gaunts in the 1490s, who mentioned in her will Dr. John Spyne, a friar at the Carmelite house and a writer of theological treatises.[76] Thus it would appear that the Bristol Carmelites had links with both urban and gentry women living or connected with the city. Why did the order achieve a measure of popularity with women? In part, some of the reason must lie with the explanation given above regarding the general popularity of the Carmelites among the Bristol laity,

namely that it reflected the value placed upon the contemplative life by lay folk, and perhaps provided an acceptable outlet for pious impulses in a community where few of them actually took upon themselves to follow such a life. This may have held particularly true for women of élite families, some of whom I have suggested, and will argue in greater depth later, appear to have been drawn towards the religious life but were unable to fulfil such aspirations.[77] It will also be recalled that, where women revealed a preference for one of the enclosed orders, it was for the Carthusians, another eremitically-inclined order; hence some measure of consistency can perhaps be detected among the preferences of Bristol laywomen for certain types of religious orders.

The Secular Clergy

The secular clergy comprised a varied group within the city and included parish incumbents, stipendaries and chantry priests, along with the chaplains attached to parish churches, guild and almshouse chapels, and wealthy private households. Also contained within its ranks were those who served as masters of Bristol's various medieval hospitals. It is evident that a considerable number of prosperous and prominent Bristol families had brothers, sons or nephews who served in one or other of the above capacities, in distinct contrast to the tiny number of Bristol laymen known to have joined the ranks of the regular clergy. Bristol's mercantile élite appears to have been a tight-knit community and one reason for the larger number of secular clergy may have been that they could become more easily integrated into the local lay community they served than could monks, canons and even friars, who lived a less enclosed life than the other two.[78] A number of those who joined the secular clergy actually served as parish priests or as chaplains attached to chantry, guild or hospital chapels within their native city, perhaps testifying further to the close-knit and insular character of the late-medieval urban élite there. Thomas Sampson, for example, in his 1387 will, left 20s to 'Domino

Willelmo, capellano Kalendarum, consanguineo vxoris mee' [Sir William, chaplain of the Kalendars, my wife's kinsman], while William Worcester, in his itinerary, referred to his uncle, 'Sir Thomas Botoner, priest' who was buried in All Saints' church and whom he believed to have been a fellow of the Kalendars' guild.[79] Nicholas Barstaple, eldest son of John and Isabel Barstaple, became the first master of his father's almshouse foundation at Lafford's Gate, later taking up the mastership of St. John's hospital; and three of the four sons of Thomas and Joan Halleway, founders of the elaborate chantry in All Saints', became priests, one of them being installed as the first chaplain of his parents' chantry.[80] John Thomas, vicar of that church in the 1470s and 80s, was a relative of the wealthy Chester family; and in his will of 1508, Thomas Parnaunt, a member of an equally eminent late-fifteenth-century family, left 20s, a gown and a maser to his brother John, 'parson of Seynt Ewens'.[81]

Numerous other wealthy laymen and women mentioned kin who were members of the secular clergy, although it is not clear whether they all held posts within the city. In his 1388 will, Walter Frampton, thrice Mayor of Bristol, bequeathed to 'Waltero Frampton, clerico, filio Rogeri Frampton, fratris mei' [Walter Frampton, cleric, son of my brother, Roger Frampton], shops, tenements and rents which he was to have and to hold 'quousque promotus fuit ad beneficium ecclesiasticum' [until he has been promoted to an ecclesiastical benefice], on which occasion they were to pass to his own son, also called Walter.[82] Thomas Kempson, Mayor in 1470/1, left 'togam meam de violet penulatam' [my gown of violet edged with fur] to his brother 'Domino Rogero Kempson, capellano', and 'vnam togam de violet greyned non penulatam' [a gown dyed violet with no fur] to 'Domino Wilelmo Kempson, capellano', who was also clearly a relation, although in what sort or capacity it was not specifically stated.[83] Relatives of other members of the laity became secular canons at collegiate churches. It will be recalled that

William Canynges, who served as mayor several times in the mid-fifteenth century, became a dean and priest of Westbury-on-Trym college in 1465, after the death of his wife, Joan, while John Esterfeld, in his will of 1503, left to his eldest son, Master John Esterfeld, 'chanon of Saint Georges chapell within the castell of Windesore, iii of the best gownes furred with such as shall please him to chese', along with various articles of silver plate and the best 'coverpayne otherwise called a bredecloth'.[84] Furthermore, it does seem that the proportion of Bristol families possessing kin among the secular clergy may have increased after 1450. Comparing other large cities, Norman Tanner has stated of Norwich that between 'ten and eleven per cent of the sons mentioned in the surviving wills were secular priests or members of religious orders', but goes on to state that these men 'were almost exactly divided between secular priests and members of religious orders'.[85] This differs from Bristol, where it is evident that many more men from the wealthier urban strata joined the ranks of the secular than the regular clergy. It would, of course, be of interest to know more about the levels of education attained by these men and whether they were university graduates, but none of those whom I have studied can be securely identified in the printed university registers. It has been calculated of the Bristol clergy that above '40 per cent and perhaps more than 80 per cent of the parish incumbents in 1534 were graduates, some with more than one degree.'[86] This indicates an impressively high level of educational achievement, although whether this had been the case throughout the fifteenth century is uncertain, due to the paucity and incompleteness of the records.

The substantial number of secular clergy to be found related to the Bristol laity inevitably ensured that strong links were retained between the two groups. Many parish priests and chaplains performed services as executors or witnesses of wills, doubtless because they were among those most qualified to do so. While this may not provide evidence of particularly close personal ties

between parish clergy and laity, it does indicate that the former were generally viewed by lay members of society as being a reasonably competent and trustworthy group. A large number of the bequests left to parish priests, as distinct from bequests to the church for furnishings or fabric by lay people were conventional enough, usually being money for tithes forgotten, while the small sums of money left to individual chaplains, sometimes with a specific request for their prayers or attendance at the testator's funeral, may also have had an element of convention about them, as many of these men appear to have been attached to the testator's parish church. In some cases, however, it is possible to detect a deeper attachment. Walter Derby, for instance, in his 1385 will, left to Master Thomas Spert, among other things, 'vnam zonam deauratam' which he had 'ex donatione Johannis Barstaple' [by gift of John Barstaple].[87] John Barstaple was married to Derby's daughter, and the fact that the testator thought fit to bequeath to Spert an item that had been given to him by his son-in-law indicates that the relationship between the two men was one of trust and long standing. Others received gifts of some value. Thomas att Haye instructed that Sir David Walsche, chaplain, was to receive £21 6s 8d to celebrate for his soul for four years but also left him 'optimam togam meam de baudekyn' [my best gown of baudekyn].[88] Similarly, John Nancothan left to Sir Robert Dewy, chaplain of the fraternity of St. John the Baptist of which the former himself had served as secular master, 'vnam togam colouris blacke et line engreyned cum quadam furrura vocata le croppe de grey' [a gown of colour black and a cord dyed with a certain fur called the 'croppe' of grey] while Edward Kyte in 1487 left 'meum equum' [my horse] to Sir Thomas Lyncoln who was named as a chaplain in the will of Kyte's wife, Agnes.[89]

There is also some evidence of associations and connections between lay and clerical bibliophiles and a shared interest in devotional and theological texts. Henry Wyvelescombe in his 1393 will left to Sir Thomas Frensshe, chaplain,

20s and 'meum salterum in cista' [my psalter in the chest] and to Sir Henry Inet, chaplain, 20s of silver and a copy of Henry Suso's 'Orologium Sapiencie'.[90] In 1416, Belinus Nansmoen, married with one daughter, mentioned his two books, of which one was called 'Sextus continens textum et glosam ordinariam suam cum doctoribus Johanne Andrea Archidiaconia Bou(?) et diuersis dignis' [the Sixth containing the text and its ordinary gloss together with the doctors John Andrea, Archdeacon of Bou(?) and other worthy men]. The other contained 'doctores super Clementinos videlicet Paulum Jacelyn et aliis [the doctors upon the Clementines, namely Paul Jacelyn and others], and willed that they were to be locked up in the church of the Blessed Mary of Redcliffe, 'sic quod vicarius et capellani ibidem in ecclesia predicta Beate Marie de Redeclyue studere possunt in eis cum eis placuerit' [so that the vicar and chaplains in the church of the Blessed Mary of Redcliffe might study them whenever they pleased].[91] These bequests to various chaplains by male testators suggest that there may have existed loose networks of individual laymen and members of the secular clergy of which women did not or could not become a part. It may be noted that some of the chaplains to whom such bequests were left served in a number of wealthy and prominent chapels or fraternities (such as the chapel of the Assumption of the Blessed Mary on Bristol Bridge, St. George's chapel adjoining the Guildhall, and later St. Clement's chapel within the precincts of St. Bartholomew's Hospital), which had male-only memberships. Such networks or groupings may reflect both the ability of the male élite to move more freely within the urban community and the fact that their lives were lived more or as much in the public sphere as the private one.

Apart from their parish priests and household chaplains, only a few women in their wills mentioned individual clergy with whom they may have been more than summarily acquainted. Isabel Barstaple left 20s, more than the usual sum of a few pence, to 'Domino Henrico, Priori Kalendarum, Bristoll' [Sir Henry,

Prior of the Kalendars] as well as bequests of varying sums to a number of the chaplains attached to Trinity Hospital, so that they might pray for her soul, although it is likely that she may have known them personally quite well because of her association with her husband's foundation.[92] Another widow, Giles George *alias* Swayne, appears to have had a number of close associations with the master and brethren attached to St. John's Hospital at Redcliffe, while gentry women such as Elizabeth Cornwell and Jane Guildford developed close links with some of the individual brethren attached to St. Mark's Hospital: these women lived in or near the institution in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries;[93] and it is important to note that the brethren dwelt within or formed part of the immediate surroundings of them both. Again, this raises the issue of male and female access to space within the urban community, both public and private, physical and psychological, something which is of particular importance in the case of women because of the greater restrictions on their freedom of movement. It can be argued that their power to form relationships with such men was more circumscribed by their restricted ability to enter and inhabit certain spaces than was that of their male counterparts, an issue which assumes a particular importance when we turn to look at the employment of private chaplains within the urban household.

Although some research has been done on private chaplains attached to noble and gentry abodes, less is known about those serving within urban households and their interaction with the families who employed them.[94] There certainly appear to be fewer references to such men in urban wills than in those of the gentry and nobility.[95] Some merchants amassed enormous wealth and built large and impressive town houses, but space within the urban community was at a premium, and for the most part the wealthy élite were not able to emulate the size and grandeur of many noble and gentry households, which often contained large numbers of people, and which, as the fifteenth century progressed, increasingly came to possess spaciously ornate private chapels.

Furthermore, it can be argued that for a wealthy urban layman or woman, religious life in towns was inevitably centred as much if not more so on his or her parish church as on the household, most dwellings being situated in very close proximity, perhaps only a few yards, from the former, unlike gentry or noble residences which might be sited at some distance away from it. Yet although town households were perhaps less likely to have separate private chapels and to employ chaplains than noble and gentry families, it was by no means unknown. Sylvia Thrupp, for instance, in her study of the London mercantile class, has found that some of the grandest houses of individual London merchants possessed chapels by the late medieval period.[96] There is evidence too, from the early fourteenth century, that a few members of the Bristol urban élite were concerned with making arrangements for devotional activities within their households. The registers of the bishops of Worcester and those of Bath and Wells contain several entries recording grants of licences to various members of the Gloucestershire and Somerset gentry for altars to be erected and mass to be celebrated within their private residences and, although these seem to be thin on the ground for Bristol, a 1332 entry to be found in the register of Ralph of Shrewsbury, Bishop of Bath and Wells, records a 'licence for Hugh de Langebrugge, citizen of Bristol, to erect an altar and have divine services celebrated in his mansion at Bristol before himself and his wife.'[97] By the later fifteenth century, it seems that more of the houses of wealthy Bristol merchants contained private chapels. William Canynges's Redcliffe mansion, described as a 'very fair dwelling house' by Worcester, clearly possessed one. In Dallaway's edition of the topographer's text, he states in a footnote, that in his time (1834) the house still stood 'with the Hall and Oratory'.[98]

A small number of male wills mention household chaplains including that of the aforementioned merchant, Walter Frampton, who left small bequests to a number of individual chaplains, but who was by far the most generous to

'Johanni Knygton, capellano meo', to whom he left £20, 'a charger [dish] argenteum, iij platers et iij potegers et ij sausers argenteos'.[99] Robert Gardener, likewise, in 1392 mentioned a number of chaplains, including David Coade, 'capellanus meus', who was to celebrate for his soul for four years, for which he was to receive a yearly salary of 10 marks, and John Castell in 1401 left similar instructions for 'Dominus Adam, qui fuit capellanus meus ' [Sir Adam, who was my chaplain].[100] However, as far as I have been able to tell, it seems that a higher proportion of women thought fit to mention or to reveal more details about the personal or private chaplains employed by them, hinting perhaps at the importance of such a relationship in their lives.[101] As early as 1309, the will of Felicia Tropeyn contains bequests to 'Willelmo Wille, capellano meo' of 10s and 'l tapetum mixtum cum ruellis' [l tapestry of mixed dye with roundels].[102] For the most part, those women who mentioned their personal or household chaplains were wealthy widows who had been used to running their own household for several years, although the will of Margaret Young *alias* att Berugh, still married to her second husband, Thomas Young, when she made her will in 1406, mentioned 'Thome Goode, capellano meo' to whom she left 12s 4d.[103] Margaret's first husband, like her second, was one of Bristol's most wealthy and influential men, Peter att Berugh, and it would be of interest to know whether Thomas Goode had served her throughout her first marriage, transferring to her new household on her second. He is not mentioned in att Berugh's 1396 will, which may indicate that he was her own personal chaplain as much as or rather than a household or family one. A few years later, Margery Hastings, who married into the wealthy Halleway family, left the small sum of 10d to 'Domino Johanni, capellano meo' in her 1413 will; and Joan Kempson, in 1479 was more generous, leaving 'quatuor virgatas viridis pani' [four yards of green cloth] to 'Domino Ricardo, capellano meo'.[104]

Alice Warminster, widow of a former mayor of Bristol, clearly thought

highly of her chaplain. The references she makes to him in her will are worth mentioning, not only for the information they unveil about her possible relationship with him, but also because they hint at the devotional arrangements within her home. She left to her parish church of St. Werburgh 'calicem meum optimum' [my best chalice] and a 'par vestimentorum meorum' [a pair of my vestments], but stated that 'Magister Willelmus Celloyd, capellanus meus' was to have the 'vsum illorum et custodiam' [the use and keeping of them]. She also instructed that he was to have a 'par vestimentorum meorum cum apparato [a pair of vestments with furnishings/equipment] belonging 'ad altare in camera mea' [to the altar in my room/chamber] and 'meam peciam argenteam stantem cum coopertorio vocato Anglico stondynge pece' [my silver cup which stands with a cover called an English standing cup].[105] She further assigned to him the rents from various tenements and shops in Bristol which he was to receive until his decease with the proviso that he would pray for her soul and that of her husband. Alice's statement that her private altar was 'in camera mea' [in my room/chamber] is open to interpretation. It would seem that if this place had been a separate private chapel within the household, it would have been referred to as a 'capella'. It was probably therefore either a reference to her own private closet or bedchamber or to a small room especially set aside for private devotions. No other woman appears to have made reference to a private chapel or room set aside for devotions within her household, although Giles Swayne in her 1495 will mentioned 'a tabulam plicanteam' possibly a folding portable altar which she left to one of the brethren of St. John's hospital, Benedict Prendergast, which is suggestive of her private devotional arrangements and of the possibility that Prendergast had served as her chaplain or confessor.[106] Alice Warminster's relationship with William Celloyd was clearly a close one, for he appears to have received considerably more than her friends and associates and, in some cases, members of her family,

although it is of course possible that provision had been made for them elsewhere or that all the items left to them by her were not mentioned in the will. Celloyd is not mentioned in the will of her husband, William, just as none of the chaplains mentioned by the other women I have discussed are to be found in the wills of their respective spouses. However, it is apparent that the close relationship that might exist between widow and household chaplain could ensure continuity of service within the family after the woman's decease. Maud Baker's son, Thomas, for instance, left a bequest in his will to a man whom he informs us had once served as a chaplain to his mother.[107] Little work has been done on the subject of urban women and those employed to serve the devotional needs of their households, so that it is difficult to compare the experiences of the Bristol women with those of urban élite women elsewhere, although in some of the individual studies of London widows edited by Caroline Barron and Anne Sutton, references are made to household chaplains or members of the secular clergy who appear to have enjoyed some degree of friendship with or been assigned some degree of responsibility by the woman in question.[108]

While women generally were perhaps less likely than men to associate or forge close relationships with those chaplains attached to institutions outside of the household, some wealthy benefactresses did come to develope a keen rapport with their parish priest. It was not only or so much that female testators left substantial sums of money or bequests of a personal nature to these men, but that they entrusted to them particular tasks, as well as or sometimes in preference to their male relatives. Joan Kempson, for instance, in 1479, left £100 to buy tenements 'ad exhibendum vnum capellanum perpetuum' [for the support of a perpetual chaplain] in Temple church, which sum of money was to be kept 'ad vsum predictum' [for the said use] by Sir John Mason, vicar of that church, Robert Bannok and John Jay, merchants of Bristol, until they should hold the said tenements 'imperpetuum et pacifico' [in

perpetuity and peacefully]. Each of them was to have 'vnam clauem de capsa deputanda pro secura custodia predictarum centum libraram' [a key to a box assigned/designated for the safekeeping of the said one hundred pounds]. Further, her executors were to carry out all that she had willed 'per consilium Domini Johanis Mason, vicarii' [on the advice of John Mason, vicar].[109] In her will of 1494, Elizabeth Bayly, widow of another wealthy merchant, instructed that a number of the gifts bequeathed to female friends and members of her household were to be left 'after the discrecioun' of John Vaughan, parish priest of St. Stephen's, including 'a fedyr bedd, a flokke bed with a coueryng' intended for her servant, Isabel, and a gift of a 'salt selor coueryd with siluer and ouyr gilte and vj of my best spones' left to Isabel Bracy, daughter of the merchant, Denys Bracy. These last were to 'remayn in the handys of the seid Maister John Vaughan till the tyme she be maried', and if she died before her coming of age, 'then the seid goodys to remayne to the seid Maister John Vaughan'. He was also to receive the residue of 'my goodys not bequeithid' and unusually was made her 'soole executore'.[110] Both Elizabeth Bayley and John Vaughan, a member of the wealthy Bristol mercantile family of that name, were generous benefactors to St. Stephen's church, as the 1494 inventory book shows, and it may well have been John Vaughan's influence as much as Elizabeth's pious impulses that prompted her generosity to the church.[111]

Certainly, the influence of parish priests upon the piety of wealthy widows can be seen elsewhere, most notably in the case of Agnes Fyler who died in 1467, and Maurice Hardwick, parish priest of All Saints' church from 1455-72. The matter in which they were both involved provides an illustration of a relationship between pious female parishioner and priest which (while being harmonious in nature and indeed beneficial for the church) had wider repercussions for them both, leading to acrimony with members of Agnes's family. Sir Maurice Hardwick was an extremely generous benefactor to his

church and evidently keen to exhort others to such generosity.[112] As already discussed, a number of wealthy widows living in All Saints' parish are known to have been keen benefactresses to its church in the second half of the fifteenth century, and it was with one of them, the abovenamed Agnes, that Sir Maurice appears to have struck up a strong rapport, something indicated by the widow's will, where she left him the conventional offering for tithes unpaid, but also 'vnum calicem argenteum et deauratum' which she specifically stated was to be 'ad vsum suum' [for his own use].[113] Both Agnes and her husband, Thomas, were among the parish well-to-do, Thomas serving as churchwarden several times and last mentioned as acting in that capacity in 1456-7. Together, they made a number of substantial donations to their parish church, including 'the roof to cover the south aisle'. However, it was the gift of '1 tenement in the High Street' where Agnes once dwelt, which led to friction between Sir Maurice and her son, a London mercer also called Thomas. The gift was evidently intended to be a joint one on behalf of Agnes and her husband, but Thomas died, leaving the final decision and arrangements to his widow. Ultimately, it was Sir Maurice who 'procured moved and stirred Agnes Fyler to give her said house in the which she dwelt in the High Street, on the south side of the Green Lattice.'[114] The fact that Sir Maurice felt compelled to put pressure on Agnes suggests that her wishes and intentions were already being questioned or challenged by her son before the will was drawn up. The church book states that Thomas 'would have broken her last will and alyenyd [alienated] the house to his own use, [and] promised the said Sir Maurice great good to assist him', but 'the said Sir Maurice and William Rowley and John Compton, churchwardens, by plea withstood him as it appears in their said account.'[115] The churchwardens' accounts for 1467-8 record three money transactions, one of 11s 8d 'for writing and sealing Agnes Fyler's testament', another of 8d 'for entering a plaint against Thomas Fyler' and a third one of 8s 'for writing an indenture between the church and Thomas

Fyler.'[116] Agnes's will was written on 8th November 1467 and proved three weeks later, but it is unclear whether the will in its final form represents the original wishes of Agnes or whether it was essentially a compromise made in an attempt to appease the warring parties. It specified that Thomas was to have the house and tenement in the High Street, which on his decease was to go to his sister, Joan, but when she died, rather than descending to her heirs, it was to go to 'Domino Mauricio Hardwyk, vicario ecclesie parochiali Omnium Sanctorum, Johanni Compton and Wilelmo Rowley', procurators of the said church, to be held by them and their assigns.[117]

It has been suggested that the Fyler affair was one of the reasons for the compilation of the All Saints' church book in the late fifteenth century, such an exercise being necessary to ensure not only that disputes over benefactions to the church did not so easily occur in the future, but also possibly to downplay the Fyler influence in light of the activities of Thomas Fyler junior, by emphasizing the generosity of other benefactors.[118] Whatever the case, it is evident that such a relationship between a pious female parishioner and her parish priest had the potential to sow seeds of discord between lay, or more specifically, family and clerical authority.[119] In this respect, it can be argued that Agnes's marital status was important. As a wealthy urban widow, she had considerably more freedom of manoeuvre over her person and belongings than did her single and married sisters, but it may have been this very freedom which, in a sense, created a problem. Generally, neither single nor married women of the élite had the authority or means to dispose of property or goods as they pleased, the former being subject to the authority of her father if he were alive and the latter to that of her spouse; thus a dispute such as occurred between the Fylers and Hardwick would, perhaps, have been less likely to arise. A wealthy widow, despite her greater liberty of movement, might find herself subject to the pressing claims of numerous relatives, dependants, friends and acquaintances for her affections and loyalty, and

disputes could most easily arise, perhaps, when those competing for her affections and favour comprised members from both secular and religious spheres. It is possible to argue, therefore, that the Fyler case reveals not only a straightforward conflict of interest between church and family authority, but the anxiety felt by kin as regards the nature of female piety, or more precisely, the form female pious aspirations and inclinations could take. There was always the possibility that the benefit accruing to the church by a wealthy widow's pious gestures may have been detrimental to the interests of her kin. Is it possible that these fears may have been heightened and such issues thrown into sharper focus within urban society, where people lived generally in closer proximity to the outward symbols of religious authority and those who served in them? It is worthwhile, perhaps, to draw attention back to the activities of those other wealthy widows who lavishly endowed All Saints' church in the second half of the fifteenth century, for it seems a distinct possibility that these women may have been emboldened or encouraged in their activities and benefactions by Maurice Hardwick, his successors and predecessors. It can thus be suggested that the relationships which could develop between members of the secular clergy and wealthy, pious laywomen played a part in the creation of a female or feminized space within the church building, an issue which I have discussed in more depth in an earlier chapter.[120]

Overall, then, it may be concluded that ties between the secular clergy and the laity, particularly the lay élite, within the medieval urban community were strong, many of the former belonging to one or other of Bristol's wealthy families, and that this remained the case throughout the period. Indeed, many took up positions as chaplains, priests and hospital masters within their native city. However, some differences can be observed between the relationships of laymen and laywomen with such men. Bequests left in wills suggest that male testators rather than female tended to associate more closely with those chaplains serving the various chapels and churches within the city while women

were more likely to mention private household chaplains. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that in some cases, as regards the latter, a strong mutual rapport or closeness existed between the two parties. This was perhaps connected to the fact that women lived a less mobile life-style than men, their lives consequently being more household-centred. Furthermore, even though women could become members of parish and of some religious guilds, in Bristol at least, they did not have access to a number of the wealthier religious fraternities attached to some of the larger chapels and guilds where such men served.[121] Yet, it is evident that some wealthy and pious laywomen formed strong friendships with their parish priest, the parish church, particularly in an urban community, being the most obvious place outside the immediate vicinity of the household where their presence was not only permitted but expected, and where it would not elicit suspicion or disapproval. Thus it can be argued that to some extent, it was opportunity of movement and the ability to inhabit the various spaces around them that governed the relationship between women and members of the secular clergy, as was the case regarding so many of their relationships with lay and religious groups and individuals in society.

NOTES

1. *VCH Gloucester*, II, 74. The priory church still stands behind the modern bus station.
2. Great Orphan Book, f. 189r.
3. *Ibid.*, f. 11r.
4. *Ibid.*, f. 45r.
5. Gloucestershire possessed houses of Benedictine monks at Deerhurst, Gloucester, Leonard Stanley, Tewkesbury, and Winchcombe, with Cistercian foundations at Flaxley, Hailes and Kingswood. In Somerset, there were four Benedictine houses, at Athelney, Bath, Glastonbury and Muchelney, with a small cell attached to Bath Priory at Dunster. There were also the two Carthusian houses of Hinton and Witham, a Cistercian house at Cleeve and a Cluniac priory at Montacute. Nearby Wiltshire possessed only one small Cluniac foundation at Monkton Farleigh and a Cistercian abbey at Stanley, although in neighbouring Dorset, by contrast, there were five Benedictine houses at Abbotsbury, Cerne Abbas, Cranbourne, Milton Abbas and Sherborne, two Cistercian houses at Bindon and Forde, and one Cluniac at Holme. For a map showing the location of these settlements see J. H. Bettey, *The Suppression of the Monasteries in the West Country* (Gloucester: Sutton,

1989), p. 3.

6. By comparison with Bristol, a study of the Somerset lay wills made between 1383-1500 and transcribed by Weaver, shows that the two Carthusian houses received a small but steady stream of bequests from testators, although it cannot be said that they enjoyed greater popularity than any of the other male religious orders in the county.

7. For a history of the Carthusians in England see E. M. Thompson, *The Carthusian Order in England* (London: SPCK, 1930) and by the same author, *A History of the Somerset Carthusians* (London: Hodges, 1895).

8. Great Orphan Book, ff. 4^r^, 7^v^.

9. Veale, *Great Red Book. Part II.*, pp. 195-7.

10. *CPR 1367-70*, p. 278.

11. Great Orphan Book, f. 5^r^.

12. See, for example, the 1494 will of William Spencer, merchant of Bristol, registered at PRO, PCC 17 Vox (PROB 11/10), f. 132^v^, who mentioned a number of English Carthusian houses.

13. Both Margaret Beaufort and Cecily of York were attracted to the spirituality espoused by the Carthusians: see respectively, Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, pp. 147, 180-2, and Armstrong, 'Piety of Cecily, Duchess of York', pp. 82-3. For the connections of other noble women with Carthusian spirituality see Meale, 'Oft siþis with grete deuotion', pp. 22-34.

14. PRO, PCC Marche 15 (PROB 11/2a), f. 116^v^. For Maud Baker and the Carthusians see Chapter 7, pp. 261-4 below.

15. Great Orphan Book, f. 4^r^. For Walter Monyton or Mointon, Abbot from 1342, see James Parker, 'Glastonbury Abbey', *PSANHS*, 26 (1880), pp. 25-107 (pp. 82, 92).

16. Great Orphan Book, f. 11^r^.

17. On the Bristol laity and recruitment to the religious orders see pp. 134-5 above.

18. Great Orphan Book, f. 30^r^.

19. *Ibid.*, f. 69^r^.

20. See *ibid.*, f. 42^r^, for the 1393 will of William Hervy.

21. See Tanner, *Church in Late Medieval Norwich*, pp. 124-5, 221. For London see Thomson, 'Piety and Charity', pp. 189-90, where he asserts that two fifths of wills contained bequests to religious houses and notes the 'progress of the Carthusians', although he does not state whether bequests to monastic houses declined generally. D. M. Palliser, *The Reformation in York 1534-1553*, Borthwick Papers 40 (York: St. Martin's Press, 1971), pp. 2-3, has found that there were far fewer bequests to the monastic houses than to the friaries in that city, but that there was no notable drop in bequests to either of them before the Reformation. Peter Heath, 'Urban Piety in the Late Middle Ages: the Evidence for Hull Wills', in R. B. Dobson (ed.), *The Church, Politics and Patronage in the Fifteenth Century* (Gloucester: Sutton; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984), p. 221, comments on the fact that, throughout the period, few of the inhabitants of medieval Hull left bequests to the nearby Carthusian house of Beauvale.

22. Joseph Bettey, *St. Augustine's Abbey* (Bristol: Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, 1996), pp. 13-16. For the various donations made to the abbey by the Berkeleys see Walker, *Cartulary of St. Augustine's*, and Jeayes, *Descriptive Catalogue*. On the Berkeley tombs within St. Augustine's see Ida K. Roper, 'Effigies of Bristol', *TBGAS*, 26 (1903), pp. 215-51.

23. Ross, *Cartulary of St. Mark's*, pp. 35-45. An account of the quarrel can also be found in Charles Ross, 'College Green in the Middle Ages' in Elizabeth Ralph and John Rogan, *Essays in Cathedral History* (Clifton: Friends of Bristol Cathedral, 1991), pp. 19-22.

24. See Chapter 2, pp. 81-2 above.

25. Elizabeth Ralph (ed.), *The Great White Book of Bristol*, BRS 32 (1979),

pp. 2-3, 17-67.

26. Gwen Beachcroft and Arthur Sabin (eds.), *Two Compotus Rolls of Saint Augustine's Abbey, Bristol for 1491-2 and 1511-12*, BRS 9 (1983), p. 27.

27. The latter were mostly the Berkeleys, although the household accounts of the Staffords reveal some payments made to the Victorine houses of St. Augustine in Bristol and Keynsham: see Brewer and Gairdner, *Letters, Foreign and Domestic*, III (i), 496.

28. Great Orphan Book, f. 45^{r}.

29. *Ibid*, f. 165^{r}. Throughout this chapter, I have translated 'dominus' as applied to male religious as 'sir', although this in no way implies armigerousness.

30. Strong, *All Saints' Deeds*, p. 22.

31. Great Orphan Book, ff. 198^{r}, 201^{v}.

32. Walker, *Cartulary of St. Augustine's*, pp. 332-4.

33. Great Orphan Book, f. 119^{v}.

34. Beachcroft and Sabin, *Two Compotus Rolls*, pp. 256-7.

35. Great Orphan Book, f. 59^{r}.

36. PRO, PCC 9 Marche (PROB 11/2a), f. 66^{r}.

37. PRO, PCC 23 Milles (PROB 11/8), f. 186^{v}.

38. *CPR 1385-9*, p. 37.

39. Fleming and Costello, *Discovering Cabot's Bristol*, pp. 36, 38-9; Burgess, *Parish Church and the Laity*, p. 14.

40. PRO, PCC 14 Logge (PROB 11/7), f. 104^{r}.

41. For instance, both the sons of the John Paston who died in 1466 were named John: see H. S. Bennett, *The Pastons and their England* (Cambridge: Canto edition, 1995), p. 13.

42. PRO, PCC 36 Wattys (PROB 11/6), ff. 278^{v}-279^{r}.

43. *VCH Somerset*, II, 134; Emden, *Biographical Register*, p. 467. See also Chapter 2, pp. 73-6 above for a comparison between Maud Baker and Alice Chester. It is perhaps significant that the two Bristol women about whose pious inclinations and activities we know the most both had a child in religious orders.

44. For an overview of the origins and early history of the friars see C. H. Lawrence, *The Friars: the Impact of the Early Mendicant Movement on Western Society* (London and New York: Longman, 1994).

45. Bristol, as the largest town in the region, was the only one to have possessed houses of all four mendicant orders. There were no friaries in either Bath or Taunton in Somerset, although the Franciscans were established in Bridgwater and the Dominicans in Ilchester. The city of Gloucester possessed Dominican, Franciscan and Carmelite friaries, but there were no other mendicant houses in the county.

46. Part of the medieval friary still survives in the building now known as Quaker's Friars, which serves as a registry office. A plan of the original layout of the friary buildings, based on archaelogical evidence, can be found in Wilfred Leighton, 'The Blackfriars, now Quaker's Friars, Bristol', *TBGAS*, 55 (1933), pp. 151-90, (facing p. 188).

47. The origins of the Dominican friary's association with the Baker's guild is unknown. The book recording the transactions of the guild only begins in 1499, but from entries made at the beginning of the document, it is evident that the connection between the friary and the guild went back further than this: see Leighton, 'Blackfriars', p. 185.

48. For a site plan of the Greyfriars drawn from excavations done in 1973 see the short pamphlet by M. W. Ponsford, *Excavations at Greyfriars, Bristol* (Bristol: City of Bristol Museum, 1975). (Unpaginated). Modern buildings now occupy the site where the friary once stood. For a history of the order in Bristol see G. E. Weare, *A Collectanea relating to the Bristol Friars Minors and their Convent* (Bristol: Bennett, 1893).

49. For a site plan and observations based on excavations carried out earlier

in the twentieth century see John E. Pritchard, 'Bristol Archaelogical Notes for 1904', *TBGAS*, 29 (1906), pp. 133-45.

50. Neale, *William Worcestre*, pp. 18-19, 190-1.

51. Leland, *Itinerary*, V, 93; Neale, *William Worcestre*, pp. 92-3.

52. *CPR 1307-13*, p. 596.

53. Saul, *Religious Sympathies of the Gentry*, p. 108.

54. There appears to be little evidence of conflict with the secular clergy over such matters as rights of confession and burial as was sometimes the case elsewhere: see Martha C. Skeeters, *Community and Clergy: Bristol and the Reformation c. 1530-c. 1570* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 17-19.

55. *Ibid.* pp. 73-4. These ideas are discussed more fully in her previous work, 'The Clergy of Bristol, c.1530-c.1570' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Texas, 1984), pp. 106-7.

56. See Chapter 1, pp. 17-21 above for discussion of Bristol's economic growth and the structure of its society.

57. Tanner, *Church in Late Medieval Norwich*, p. 119; Thomson, *Piety and Charity*, pp. 189-90; Palliser, *Reformation in York*, p. 2.

58. See Dilks, *Bridgwater Borough Archives,1377-99*, p. 30.

59. Nicholas Herbert, *Medieval Gloucester 1066-1547: An Extract from the Victoria County History of Gloucester. IV. The City of Gloucester* (Gloucester, Gloucester Record Office, repr. 1993), pp. 62-3.

60. Saul, 'Religious Sympathies of the Gentry', p. 100.

61. Brown, *Popular Piety in the Diocese of Salisbury*, p. 29.

62. See Great Orphan Book, ff. 28^{v}, 49^{v}, 78^{r}, 95^{v}, for the respective wills of Walter Stodeley (d. 1387), John Wyke (d. 1393), Robert Lygh (d. 1401), and John Bount (d. 1404). The 1388 will of a Richard Derneford is registered in the Great Orphan Book, f. 24^{r-v}, and, although I have been unable to establish a direct link with any individual member of the laity, it perhaps suggests that the abovementioned friar may have been of Bristol origin. A number of other men and women left money to individual friars, as well as or apart from bequests to the friaries themselves. However, they did not usually specify which order they belonged to and so far, it has not proved possible to uncover any details on the lives of these men.

63. The Dominican house appears to have been popular with some local gentry families such as the Berkeleys, Daubeneys and De Gourneys during the period covering 1200-1500: see Leighton, 'Black Friars', pp. 168-9.

64. The deed is translated in Weare, *Friars Minors of Bristol*, pp. 61-3.

65. Great Orphan Book, f. 226^{r}.

66. *Ibid.*, ff. 197^{v}, 209^{r}.

67. *Ibid.*, f. 72^{r}.

68. *Ibid.*, f. 68^{v}. For the Halleways see Chapter 1, p. 35 above.

69. Veronica Sekules, 'Women's Piety and Patronage' in Nigel Saul (ed.), *Age of Chivalry: Art and Society in Late Medieval England* (London: Brockhampton Press, 1992), pp. 120-31 (p. 120); Robert A. Wood, 'Poor Widows, c. 1393-1415' in Barron and Sutton, *Medieval London Widows*, pp. 55-69 (p. 62).

70. On the recluse at the Blackfriars see Chapter 7, pp. 247-9 below.

71. Great Orphan Book, f. 211^{v}.

72. The petition is transcribed by Weare, *Friars Minors of Bristol*, pp. 47-9.

73. Great Orphan Book, ff. 140^{r}, 191^{r}.

74. In Bristol, about half of all widowed women asked for burial beside their husbands, a figure similar to that found for urban women elsewhere: see Barron, 'Introduction', in Barron and Sutton, *Medieval London Widows*, p. xxxiii.

75. Great Orphan Book, f. 136^{r}.

76. See Chapter 2, p. 88 above.

77. See Chapter 3, pp. 113-24 above, and for the individual case of Alice Baker Chapter 7, pp. 250-8 below.

78. It should, however, be pointed out that there could be some overlap between the duties required of some of the regular clergy and the seculars. For instance, regular canons could be appointed to serve parish churches in the possession of their community, while disputes sometimes occurred between parish priests and the orders of friars over rights of confession and burial: see n. 54.

79. Great Orphan Book, f. 18r; Neale, *William Worcestre*, pp. 15-17, 56-57.

80 Atchley, 'Halleway Chantry', pp. 95, 105. For Nicholas Barstaple see Chapter 5, p. 183 below.

81. Burgess, *Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints'*, p. xxxix; PRO, PCC 6 Bennett (PROB 11/16), f. 42v.

82. Great Orphan Book, f. 21v.

83. *Ibid*, f. 204v.

84. See Sherbourne, *William Canynges*, pp. 19-23; PRO, PCC 26 Holgrave (PROB 11/14), f. 206r. For information on the collegiate church of St. George at Windsor see *VCH Berkshire*, II, 106.

85. Tanner, *Church in Late Medieval Norwich*, pp. 25-6.

86. Skeeters, *Community and Clergy*, pp. 24-5.

87. Great Orphan Book, f. 15r.

88. *Ibid.*, f. 37r.

89. *Ibid.*, ff. 189v, 240r.

90. *Ibid.*, ff. 16v-r. It may be worthwhile to note that Suso's text was originally composed for a woman.

91. *Ibid.*, ff. 127r-v.

92. *Ibid.*, f. 115v.

93. For Giles Swayne see p. 159 above, and for Elizabeth Cornwell and Jane Guildford see Chapter 2, pp. 82-93 above.

94. See R. G. K. A. Mertes, 'The Household as a Religious Community', in Joel Rosenthal and Colin Richmond (eds.), *People, Politics and Community in the Later Middle Ages* (Gloucester: Sutton; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), pp. 123-39 (pp. 125-7).

95. Heath, 'Urban Piety in the Later Middle Ages', pp. 225-6, has found that such people were only occasionally mentioned in the wills of the Hull laity.

96. Thrupp, *Merchant Class of Medieval London*, pp. 133-5.

97. Thomas Scott Holmes, *The Register of Ralph of Shrewbury, 1329-1363*, SRS 10 (1896), p. 95. Note, however, the point made by Mertes, 'Household as a Religious Community', p. 124, that licences to be found in episcopal registers are not a completely reliable guide to finding out about the existence of private chapels or devotions within the household, as in some cases it is known that 'mass was regularly held without any licence being purchased, or at any rate recorded'.

98. Dallaway, *Antiquities*, pp. 145-6. For the most recent report on the excavations carried out on the house, which was sadly demolished in the 1930s, see R. H. Jones, *Canynges House, Survey and Excavation 1983-4* (Bristol: City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, 1984). However, Jones makes no specific mention of a chapel.

99. Great Orphan Book, f. 22r.

100. *Ibid.*, f. 77r.

101. This is certainly suggested by the writings of some sixteenth- and seventeenth-century women diarists, in particular, that of Lady Margaret Hoby of Hackness, Yorkshire, whose private chaplain, Master Rhodes, appears to have been, in many ways, her closest confidant, both in matters spiritual and those of a more secular nature: see Joanna Moody, *The Private Life of an Elizabethan Lady: The Diary of Lady Margaret Hoby 1599-1605* (Stroud: Sutton, 1998).

102. BRO, Fox Collection, 08153 (i) and (iv), no. 53.

103. PRO, PCC 13 Marche (PROB 11/2a), f. 99v.

104. Atchley, 'Halleway Chantry', p. 122; Great Orphan Book, f. 211[r].
105. PRO, PCC 53 Marche (PROB 11/2b), f. 198[v].
106. PRO, PCC 25 Vox (PROB 11/10), ff. 194[v]-195[r].
107. See Chapter 7, p. 261 below.
108. See, for example, Matthew Davies, 'Thomasine Percyval, "The Maid of Week" (d. 1512)', in Barron and Sutton, *Medieval London Widows*, pp. 185-207 (p. 201), where mention is made of 'Master Wolf', Thomasine's chaplain.
109. Great Orphan Book, f. 211[r].
110 PRO, PCC 11 Vox (PROB 11/10), f. 86[r].
111. For the benefactions of Elizabeth Bayley see BRO, St. Stephen's Inventory Book, P/StS/ChW/2, ff. 23[v], 49[r].
112. For the benefactions of Sir Maurice Hardwick see Burgess, *Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints'*, pp. 9-11.
113. Great Orphan Book, f. 186[r].
114. Burgess, *Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints'*, p. 15.
115. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
116. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
117. Great Orphan Book, f. 186[r].
118. Burgess, *Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints'*, p. xviii.
119. The potential for divisiveness has been noted by Skeeters, *Community and Clergy*, p. 29, who stresses the links of individual members of the secular clergy with the city's laity, but notes the fact that the former 'were also outsiders, inhabitants with loyalties to supraurban institutions'. Hence she argues that the religious public spectacles such as the Corpus Christi procession were of particular importance, as they enabled the two groups, clergy and laity, to unite together in a common cause.
120. See Chapter 2, pp. 77-80 above.
121. For some reason, bequests to fraternities of any kind were rare in the wills of Bristol women. Only the Kalendars' guild and the Jesus guild, both of whom met in All Saints' church, were mentioned by them.

CHAPTER 5

'...IT IS A NOBLE VERTU TO DO ALMESDEDES AND TO HERBURGHE THE SERUANTES OF GOD': CHARITABLE GIVING BY AND FOR WOMEN IN LATE MEDIEVAL BRISTOL

The above quote is taken from a chapter in the *Book of the Knight of La-Tour Landry*, which, holding up the biblical Martha as an example, exhorts its intended female audience to show charitable concern for the poor, needy and unfortunate, emphasizing its importance as one of the duties of a devout Christian woman.[1] The dispensing of charity was a major aspect of late medieval piety, for as Patricia Cullum writes in her essay on female charitable giving, 'people saw it as an integral part of their understanding of their devotional lives'.[2] It was, of course, expected of a godly Christian that he or she would show concern and give generously to the poor as urged by Christ and his followers in the first Christian century, and much medieval didactic material, including the above-mentioned *Knight of La Tour-Landry*, contains sections earnestly admonishing its readers or listeners to show compassion and common humanity to their poorer neighbours. Yet charitable giving was also part of the whole system of belief concerned with the efficacy of prayers for the dead. For the giver of charity, it was one way in which the amount of time his or her soul had to endure in purgatory could be shortened by the prayers of the recipient, easing its passage upwards to heaven. The prayers of the poor, who had suffered much in this life, were seen as being particularly efficacious, although it seems that such ideology or dogma did not necessarily prevent people from discriminating, at times, between those judged to be 'deserving' and those considered to be 'non-deserving' recipients of charity. While it has been stated that 'the medieval mind and social conscience made no distinctions between an eventual sacerdotal and social end of charity', historians who have written on late medieval charity have often taken the view that the prayers to be said for the soul of the donor were of more importance than the charitable aspect, although my own study of charitable giving in

medieval Bristol suggests to me that this view is somewhat harsh.[3] Of course, there may also have been an element of convention involved, and it is not always easy or possible to know or uncover the precise nature of a donor or testator's pious intention or the depth of feeling that lay behind individual charitable impulses.

With these caveats in mind, I have looked first at large-scale charitable provision within medieval Bristol, principally hospitals and almshouses which housed a variety of poor, sick and needy, but which were also a form of chantry with the founders of such institutions keen to ensure that the inhabitants and staff performed daily or weekly prayers for their souls. I have looked at both the role played by founders and the support that their foundations received from members of the urban laity in general. Of course, only the very wealthy could afford to set up and endow such institutions, and I do not claim that women played a large part in the actual founding of hospitals and almshouses within the city. Nevertheless, it is of interest to look at both the hospital and almshouse provision made for poor women and the extent to which wealthy women can be seen to have supported these foundations. This has been followed by a section which concentrates on charitable provision made by wealthier men and women for various other poor and needy women. From the Bristol evidence, it can be seen that both male and female testators left general bequests of money, food or clothing to poor, sick and needy people, and to prisoners, in which categories women were obviously included, but in these cases there does not appear to be much variation in the type of bequest or the amount of money left by either sex. Further, bequests to such groups seem neither to have declined nor increased much throughout the period. However, as regards poor women in particular, distinct differences can be detected between male and female forms of charitable giving, which not only reflect medieval society's inherent values and ideologies regarding women, but also how such values and ideologies may have been received differently

between the sexes. I have also attempted to look at possible shifts in charitable giving to poor women over the period, especially those which may have been brought about by social and economic changes and fluctuations, as they are of particular relevance to these issues.

Hospitals and Almshouses: Twelfth- and Thirteenth-century Foundations

In the four centuries before the Reformation, at least fourteen hospitals and almshouses were founded within Bristol or its suburbs, being institutions which provided nursing care or food and shelter for various poor, destitute, sick and infirm groups of people. As in other towns and cities across the kingdom, the earliest of these, dating from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, were usually aristocratic foundations, and sited in the city's suburbs, particularly if they had been founded as leper hospitals.[4] In Bristol, although these were comparatively small institutions, moderately endowed, they tended to share a number of features with those larger hospitals founded in other towns in the same period, such as St. Leonard's in York, which had a staff caring for a number of sick, infirm, and bedridden men and women. St. Mark's, the largest of the city's hospitals, founded and expanded in the early thirteenth century by members of the Berkeley and Gurney or De Gourney families, has already been discussed. Although usually referred to as a hospital, its main charitable function appears to have been the dispensing of doles each day to a hundred poor, a number which had declined or even ceased to exist by the time of the Dissolution. It housed no sick or poor inmates within its walls, although it is evident that by the fifteenth century it accommodated wealthy corrodians, including a number of women.[5]

Three hospitals were founded in the suburb of Redcliffe, two of them by the Berkeley family, whose influence remained strong there until the early fourteenth century. The hospital of St. Katherine near Brightbow bridge was founded by Robert de Berkeley (b. 1165) sometime between 1189 and 1220,

and was patronized regularly by other members of the family until the mid-fourteenth century.[6] There is little information to be found on its staff or inmates, although a 1414 entry in the register of Nicholas Bubwith, Bishop of Bath and Wells, provides a few details about the brethren. However, it is also evident from deeds originally in the Fox collection and from the early registers of the bishops of Bath and Wells that in the early 1300s hospital sisters also served there.[7] According to one account, it housed twelve poor men, although the fact that hospital sisters are known to have been attached to it in the early fourteenth century hints at the possibility that women had once been accommodated there. It may also have served as a resting place for pilgrims on their way to Glastonbury and St. Anne's chapel at Brislington.[8] Despite the popularity of St. Katherine in Bristol in this period, the hospital was not much mentioned by Bristol testators from 1370 onwards, so that it is difficult to know what type of inmate it was catering for by the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Also at Brightbow, sited near St. Katherine's, was the hospital of St. Mary Magdalene with its attached chapel, established there in the early thirteenth century, and described by William Worcester as 'Capella sancti marie magdalene ab antiquo fundata cum hospitali gencium leprosorum' [the chapel of St. Mary Magdalene, founded long ago with a hospital for leprous people].[9] However, a 1226 grant made by Gilbert de Lacy, prebendary of Bedminster, states that its inhabitants were 'leprosae' [leprous women]. It also reveals that it was the foundation of 'Thomae de Berkeleya', probably the brother of the Robert who founded St. Katherine's.[10] There is little information to be found on the fortunes of the hospital in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and it is not known whether, with the decline in the number of people falling victim to leprosy in the later medieval period, the house took in people other than lepers, as did the hospital of St. Laurence at Lawford's Gate in Bristol, which had originally housed men and women suffering from the disease. Nor is it

clear from wills or other documents whether the house continued to provide for female inmates only. It was mentioned more often by testators than the hospital of St. Katherine, but not that frequently, in contrast to the leper hospital of St. Laurence, which continued to receive a fair number of bequests throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In 1471, a bequest of 6d was left by John Gaywode to the 'Lazarehous apud Bryghtbowe', but he did not indicate whether it was still a women-only house, and the late-fifteenth-century arrangements for the anniversary service of Alice Chester and her husband Henry, recorded in the All Saints' church book, providing for sums of money to be given to various Bristol almshouses and hospitals, including the 'poor lepers of Bryghtbowe', also failed to mention the sex of the inhabitants.[11]

The third institution sited within Redcliffe suburb was the house of St. John, often referred to as the hospital in 'Redclyfe pit' or 'pitte'. It is not known for certain who its founder was, although the Little Red Book contains a brief undated memorandum which states that 'Johannes Farceyn *alias* Farcy fuit Fundator Domus Sancti Johannis Baptiste in Redclyff pitte.'[12] Worcester describes it as 'Hospitale domus. jn Ecclesia Religionum prioris et Conuentus. sancti Johannis baptiste scitum super aquam. Avyn in altera parte Ecclesie de Radclyffe [the hospital in the church of the order of the prior and community of St. John the Baptist, sited upon the river Avon on the other side of Redcliffe church]', and it seems that it may have been larger than both the hospitals of St. Katherine and St. Mary Magdalene.[13] It contained a master and brethren who lived according to the Rule of St. Augustine, and, like St. Katherine's, in the fourteenth century it had also possessed hospital sisters. The inmates consisted of men and women, although what the criteria were for admission is unclear. Most of the wills which mention the institution refer to the 'pauperes' there, although the will of John Frenssh in 1398 contains a bequest to 'cuilibet claudo, ceco seu leproso' [every lame, blind or leprous

person] lying in the hospital of St. John the Baptist of Bristol.[14] It is evident from these wills that the hospital was particularly favoured by late-medieval testators, both male and female, in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries with some of their bequests being quite substantial.[15] The popularity of the hospital even survived a disastrous period of rule by one of the masters, John St. Paul, who allowed it to fall into ruin and dilapidation in the second decade of the fifteenth century, and who had to be forcibly removed from his post.[16] It was still of sufficient importance to have perhaps housed Henry VI on his visit to Bristol in 1446, but appears to have declined in popularity after 1450, being mentioned in fewer wills.[17] The origins of the thirteenth-century foundation, known as Burton's almshouse or hospital, which stood in the 'Langrewe' (Long Row) just off of Temple Street are obscure, but it was probably founded in 1292 by Simon Burton, Mayor of Bristol five times between 1293 and 1304.[18] The poor lying in the almshouse in 'Le Langerew' were frequently mentioned in the wills of male and female testators from the late fourteenth century, and it appears to have housed men and women, but there are few clues as to the exact nature of the foundation and whether it changed over time, although the 1411 will of John Richard refers to the 'infirmis' within 'le Langerewe Bristollie'.[19]

On the Gloucestershire side of the river stood the leper hospital of St. Laurence just beyond Lawford's Gate, probably founded by King John in the twelfth century when he was Count of Mortmain.[20] The hospital is only mentioned briefly by Worcester, but appears to have remained a fairly popular recipient of charitable bequests in the fourteenth century and the first half of the fifteenth century. A number of the antiquaries and historians who have written of Bristol have asserted that it was founded for men, although the 1208 deed of confirmation does not state that, and a bequest of 3s 4d can be found in the 1397 will of Reginald Taillour to 'hominibus et mulieribus infirmis et leprosis in hospitali Sancti Laurencii ex Laffordisyate' [the infirm and

leprous men and women within the hospital of St. Laurence outside Lafford's Gate].[21] Thus it would seem that by this period the hospital housed inmates of both sexes, and that these people may have comprised poor and generally infirm people rather than just lepers. In 1465, perhaps on account of its poverty, the hospital was granted to the collegiate church of Westbury-upon-Trym and suppressed in 1544.[22] More centrally sited by the Frome bridge stood the hospital of St. Bartholomew, founded in the 1230s by John de la Warre, lord of the manor of Brislington, for poor and infirm men and women. It served in this capacity until 1532, when its precincts became the site of the Bristol grammar school established by the merchant Robert Thorne. It was mentioned frequently in the wills of late-fourteenth-century testators, male and female, as were the sisters attached to it, although its popularity clearly declined after about 1440.[23]

The details relating to the almshouse which stood in All Saints' Lane are extremely vague. Barrett and other historians after him have stated that it was built on a tenement donated around the year 1350 by Stephen Gnowsale, or Gnowsall, but this assertion appears to be of dubious veracity. A deed of 1267 refers to a donated tenement in All Saints' Lane, one of the witnesses being Gnowsale, vicar of All Saints' in 1254, while an undated entry in the church book states that he donated a rent of 12d from this tenement to the church.[24] Very little is known of the almshouse's history until we find it mentioned in the wills of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century testators. There is a tradition that it was built for eight poor women, although those who left bequests to the house, such as John Gaywode in 1471 and William Hoton in 1474, refer only to the 'pauperibus' of the house, and do not indicate that the inhabitants were women.[25] Neither did the arrangements written down in the All Saints' church book for the anniversary service of Alice and Henry Chester, on which day the 'indigent poor in All Saints' Lane' were to receive 4d, specify that they were only of the female sex.[26] However, another entry

in the same book does hint at the possibility that it was a house for women, for it records that 'Agnes Bartlett, of the almshouse in All Hallow's Lane, at her decease gave unto the church a silver spoon weighing? 1 ounce the which is set about with stones under the figure of Jesus'.[27] It may be noted that this was not an insubstantial gift for a poor almswoman, which must raise the question of the status of the almshouse inhabitants and how poor they actually were. In the early nineteenth century, it is known that the institution housed only women; thus a tradition may have evolved that this had always been the case.[28]

Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-century Foundations

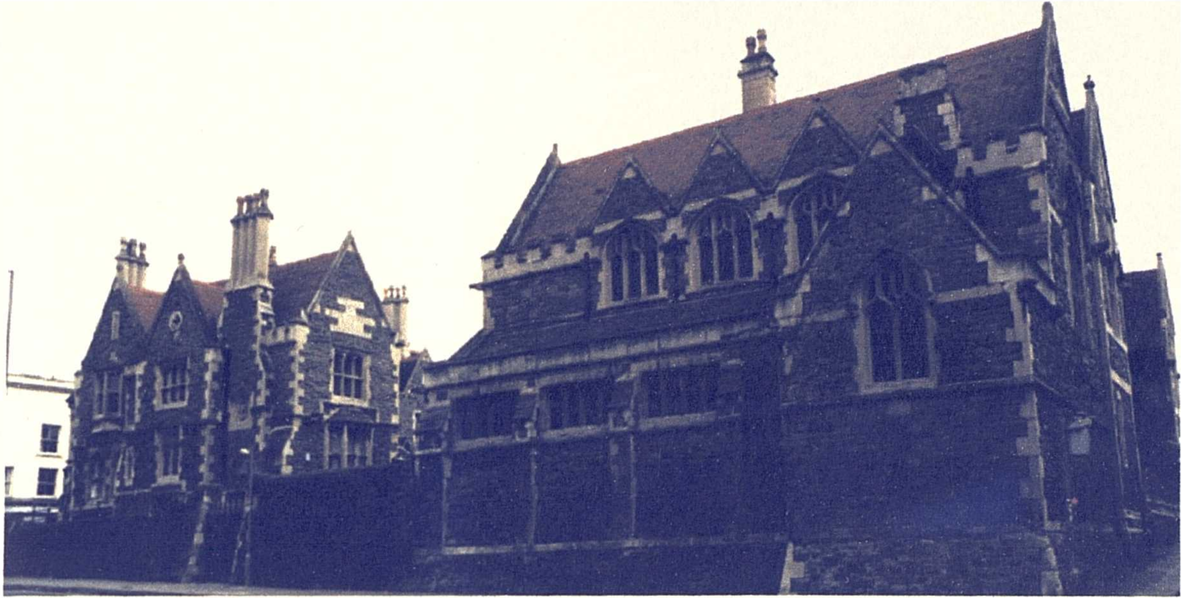
A further number of charitable institutions were established in Bristol in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and, as was the case in other towns and cities by this period, the founders were usually wealthy merchants, members of the city's élite class. These later foundations differed from the earlier ones in that although they were sometimes referred to as 'hospitals', rather than caring for large numbers of sick and infirm, they usually comprised a number of separate living compartments with a chapel, to which was attached a warden or master. They tended to cater for a small number of inhabitants, usually between twelve and twenty-four men and women over fifty years of age, and nursing care was not usually provided, although there might be a laundress, or sometimes a servant, to perform a range of general duties. Rules for entry were sometimes quite strict and the daily duties required of the inhabitants, regarding the prayers to be said for the founder's soul, could be demanding and even onerous, as was the case with Margaret Hungerford's foundation at Heytesbury in Wiltshire.[29] However, where we have some of the details relating to the founding of such institutions in Bristol, as in the case of the almshouses founded by John Barstaple in 1395 and by John Foster ninety years later, it appears that the duties required of the almsmen and women in

this respect were not particularly burdensome. It can also be argued that founders, or those involved in the setting-up of these institutions, were prepared to go to great lengths and overcome considerable difficulties in their determination to ensure that their foundations were properly established, as in the case of John Foster and John Esterfeld regarding the almshouses at the bottom of St. Michael's Hill.[30] None of the Bristol almshouses were founded by women, perhaps because, unlike noblewomen, few urban widows, even the very wealthy, possessed quite the necessary resources with which to endow one adequately. However, there are indications that in one case at least, a wife influenced the setting-up of such an establishment by her husband. This was the institution founded in 1395 by the merchant John Barstaple, who served as mayor four times in the late fourteenth century. There is a fair amount of extant material relating to the foundation, and two sets of almshouses still stand facing one another, on the north and south sides of Oldmarket Street where it adjoins Lawford's Gate, on the site occupied by the original Trinity Hospital.[31] A 1408 entry in the patent rolls, which is the earliest document relating to the foundation of the hospital, refers to an earlier licence of 1395 which had 'had no effect'.[32] Clearly the construction of the hospital had been finished in the 1390s, for a number of wills dating from that decade, refer to it. Both Peter atte Barugh in 1396 and Thomas Carpenter in 1397, left sums of money to the 'hospitali de novo facto' [newly-built] at 'Laffardisȝate'.[33]

What can be gleaned of Barstaple's piety? In his will of 1411, he asked to be buried within his foundation, 'in capella Beate Trinitatis de la Fordysȝate in sinistra parte summi altaris', while he left to the 'fraternitati' he had founded there 'post decessum Isabelle, vxoris mee, duos ciphos argenteos cum coopertulis suis' [after the decease of Isabel, my wife, two silver cups with their covers]. He mentioned the poor and needy, requesting that 100 paupers 'maxime indigentes' [most needy] should each receive 'vnam togam cum capucio de albo panno de Wallia' [a robe with a hood of white cloth of Wales], and that

the residue of his goods not willed should be sold and the money distributed to 'pauperes, debiles, infirmes, paralites et pauperes viduas' [the poor, crippled, infirm, paralysed, and poor widows] to pray for his soul.[34] It is also known that Barstaple had connections with John Bount of Bristol, a man who maintained links with the Carthusian order and other individual male religious, and who appears to have had strong leanings towards the contemplative and eremitic way of life. Furthermore, Barstaple's wife, Isabel, who may have been influential in the establishment of the almshouse, was also a woman of some piety, while the fact that one of the couple's sons, Nicholas, became the first warden or master of the almshouse suggests a strong desire on Barstaple's part to ensure that his wishes regarding the foundation were carried out in the way that he had intended. All these factors perhaps suggest that the Barstaple family was more than conventionally religious.[35]

As to the nature of the institution, the 1408 licence refers to it as 'a house of hospitality or alms' which was founded 'in honour of the Holy Trinity'. Two chaplains were 'to celebrate divine service there daily for the good estate of the said John and Isabel, his wife, and for their souls after death', while '24 poor persons' were 'to dwell there and pray for the same'. There was also to be a fraternity or 'gild perpetual' consisting of the almsfolk and 'others who may wish to be of it' housed in a separate building from the almshouse. Both almshouse and guild were to have their own warden and it was further specified that 'each of the wardens and the brethren and sisters of the fraternity shall have power to make ordinances for themselves and their successors'. The licence also allowed Barstaple to grant the advowson of the almshouse to the Mayor and Commonalty of Bristol.[36] Although it was laid down that the institution was to house twenty-four poor people, there is some uncertainty as to the number and sex of the inhabitants over the passage of time. William Worcester, writing c. 1480, asserted that the hospital was 'per... Barstaple fundatum & edificatum pro xiij hominibus pauperibus



Victorian reconstruction of Barstaple's Hospital, now known as Barstaple House. The building on the right-hand side of the picture is the chapel which originally stood on the opposite (south) side of the street. *Fig. 8*

Fig. 9

Sketches of the brasses of John and Isabel Barstaple inside the chapel. Reproduced from J. F. Nicholls and J. Taylor, *Bristol Past and Present*, II, (Bristol, 1881), p. 116.

[founded and built by...Barstaple for 13 poor men] while the chantry certificates of 1546 state that it was founded for '8 pore folks'.[37] However, the accounts of the hospital, which date from 1512, more than 100 years after its foundation, indicate that women had always been housed there, although the number of inmates seems to have varied throughout its history.[38] There are no clear indications as to the exact status or type of men and women admitted, for they are usually referred to merely as 'the poor' of the hospital at Lawford's Gate, but it seems that they may also have included the ill and infirm rather than just the poor and needy: a letter of 1399 which was obtained by Barstaple from Pope Boniface IX, principally to prevent anyone from interfering with the execution of his will as it related to the endowment of the hospital that he had founded, refers to the 'sick poor'.[39]

How influential was Isabel, John's wife, in the founding of the hospital? Some Bristol histories have stated that she was responsible for founding that part of the hospital which lay on the north side of Old Market Street. However, the 1408 licence does not state that the foundation was a joint one. The misapprehension appears to have arisen because Trinity hospital comprised two separate houses facing one another on either side of the street, but, as Wilfred Leighton suggests, this doubtless reflects John Barstaple's original intention that the almshouse and guild which made up the foundation were 'to be separately incorporated and separately housed'.[40] Nevertheless, the hospital and its adjoining chapel featured heavily in her will. She asked to be buried there 'ante imaginem Sancte Trinitatis' and was sufficiently concerned about this to insist that William Hawvyle, her parish priest, was only to receive a bequest of £3 'condicione tamen si nec ipse nec aliquis alius suo nomine impedierit corpus meum directe duci ad predictam capellam' [on condition that neither he, nor any other in his name, shall prevent my body being led/taken directly to the aforesaid chapel.] The poor of the hospital were to receive £10, while Sir William Rẏs, chaplain there, was to have 10 marks, and to celebrate

in the chapel before the image of the Holy Trinity in the year after her decease, for her soul, that of her late husband and all the faithful dead, and to have a further sum of 40s to celebrate a 'trentale Sancti Gregorii'. Sir Thomas Thorp, also a chaplain there, was to have 20s to pray for her soul, while her son Nicholas, the Master, was to have 'optimum ciphum argenteum vocatum bolle cum coopertorio' [the best silver cup called a 'bolle' with a cover], her best bed 'de Tapserywerk', along with blankets, sheets and the sum of £10.[41] Isabel's brass was placed in the chapel next to that of her husband's, and although founders of religious and charitable institutions often tended to have representations of their spouses as well as themselves on display, it may be indicative of Isabel's involvement with the project or her influence upon her husband. This argument is perhaps given further substance by the comments of Cecil Davis, who, writing on the Barstaple brasses, states that it was 'not usual to effect a memorial for a wife distinct from that of her husband in the same church', as was the case here.[42] Throughout the fifteenth century and beyond, the hospital attracted many bequests from men and women. These were usually small sums of money, although they could be more generous, as evidenced by the 1406 will of John Dunster who specified that if his children died before their coming of age, all the property left to them was to be used for the benefit of 'pauperibus tunc existentibus in hospitali Sancte Trinitatis apud portam Lafford' [the poor then being in the hospital of the Holy Trinity at Lafford's Gate].[43] The sixteenth-century accounts of the hospital show that it continued to be well-patronized by wealthy men and women.[44]

A further number of almshouse institutions were established in Bristol in the fifteenth century, although for many of them, such as those founded by William Canynges the younger c. 1440 on Redcliffe Hill, William Spencer, his contemporary and associate, in Lewin's Mead, Richard Foster at Redcliffe Gate, and St. John's almshouses sited just off modern-day Tower Lane, there is little surviving material documenting their foundation or later history.[45] Although

it seems that such establishments continued to provide for both men and women, there is less evidence of female influence or involvement, and they are mentioned more often by male testators than by female. More information is available about the almshouses with their adjoining chapel uniquely dedicated to the Three Kings of Cologne, founded by John Foster, merchant and Mayor of Bristol in 1481/2.[46] Unfortunately, Foster died before he was able to properly establish the almshouses, and ultimately it was left to John Esterfeld, one of the executors of his 1492 will, who also served as mayor of Bristol several times in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, to adequately endow and set up the foundation.[47] From the indenture written down in the Great Red Book, we are able to learn more particulars as to the nature of the foundation and its inhabitants, who were to consist of 'VIIIth poore men and fyve poore women' and who were 'to have wekele forever ijd' to pray for the souls of Foster, Esterfeld and their families, and 'a Chambyr and a gardeyn within the foresaide Almasehouse', provided that they were 'no persons maried' and 'of thage of L [50] yere' at the time of admission. After Esterfeld's death, seven of the poor men were to be chosen by the mayor and aldermen of Bristol, while four of the almswomen were to be chosen by the mayoress. The remaining man and woman were to be chosen 'by the maister of the house of Saincte Marke of Billeswyk.'[48] The almshouse was also remembered in Esterfeld's will, and although it was not specifically mentioned in the will of his third wife, Scholastica, who survived him, she did bequeath 'to euery persone of all the almshouses in Bristowe at my buryng, a half peny lofe and a peny in money and asmoche at my monethes mynde', which is notable if only for the fact that she appears to have been the only Bristol women to have mentioned the late-fifteenth-century foundations in her will.[49]

Overall then, what can be said regarding women and the founding of charitable institutions in the city in the medieval period? None were actually founded by women, and it is difficult to know how much influence wives had

over their husbands when the latter decided to found almshouses or hospitals although the evidence relating to Trinity Hospital suggests that Isabel Barstaple's influence upon her husband's project was not insubstantial. As regards female bequests to such institutions, the evidence suggests a tendency for them to favour those hospitals that had been founded in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries for the sick, poor and leprous, rather than the later almshouse foundations, although even the former type of bequest became rarer in female wills by the mid-fifteenth century. By contrast the founding of almshouses by men and bequests to such institutions became one of the most popular forms of male charity in the late fifteenth century. As regards the actual provision made for women, it may be noted that in the centuries preceding the fifteenth, some houses, such as the hospital of St. Mary Magdalene, and possibly All Saints' almshouse, were founded for the female sex alone, whereas the fifteenth-century almshouse foundations tended to cater for both sexes. For most of the Bristol houses, there is not enough information available to know whether the founders intended to provide for an equal number of men and women, but fewer places seem to have been available for the latter. It has been asserted that 'most almshouses received male inmates only', and there may be some truth in this. Locally, for instance, it may be noted that the fifteenth-century Hungerford foundation at Heytesbury in Wiltshire was intended to support twelve almsmen and only one almswoman.[50] The only one for which we have precise details is John Foster's foundation which provided a few more places for men than for women. The fact that fewer places were allotted to women may, of course, be reflective of demographic factors, in particular, the fact that fewer women than men reached old age, principally because most of the former faced the hazards of childbirth.[51] Furthermore, to a certain extent, it was expected that needy female relatives would be protected and adequately provided for by their families. However, is it also possible that the tendency to provide fewer

female places was also, in part, indicative of changing, or even perhaps, negative shifts in attitudes towards the relief of poor women in the fifteenth century? This is an issue which assumes a considerable importance in the following section which concentrates specifically on charitable giving to poor women.

Charitable Giving by and for Women

It is evident from testamentary evidence that women who fell into the categories of poor, needy and those deserving of charity, ranged from the sick and ill residing in hospitals (who tended to come from very poor backgrounds owning few or no goods or possessions) to those who lived in fifteenth-century almshouses (whose origins may have been less lowly) and those individuals who may not have been poverty-stricken as such, but who were comparatively, or relatively, poor. In any discussion of charitable provision made for the poor in the late medieval period, there is the problem of defining the word 'poor' and of knowing who exactly comprised the poor and needy, as such definitions may not only have varied or changed over time in the general perception, but differed from donor to donor. It can be argued that this is a problem relating particularly to women, and it strikes me that the ways in which women were perceived to be poor or needy differed between men and women, thereby affecting the type of charitable provision made for them. Such perceptions also, perhaps, reflected the differing male and female views of women's status and their role in society generally, and the way in which they may have changed within the urban community over time. I certainly believe that a number of changes, partly related to social and economic factors, can be detected in the charitable bequests left specifically for women, changes which in Bristol at least appear to show some correlation with the bequests left by the laity to other groups of women such as nuns and hospital sisters.

Turning first to charitable provision made for poor women by male

testators, it is evident that, as appears to have been the case elsewhere, the most common bequests were sums of money left to young, single women for their marriages.[52] Thomas Sampson, for example, in his 1387 will, left £20 to be divided up for various good causes, including aid for the marriages of 'pauperum puellarum' and John Leycester in 1436 left £10 'ad maritandum pauperes virgines'.[53] Another testator, Robert Lygh, left 50s for the same purpose but specified that the women were to be 'quinque ancillis' [five maidservants].[54] We may note the smaller sum of money set aside for the 'ancillis' than for the 'pauperes virgines' of the former bequest, which again raises the question of what class or status of recipient testators had in mind when they left such legacies, possibly demonstrating their differing conceptions of poverty and neediness. In this respect, the dowry bequests left in the 1390 will of Elias Spelly are of particular interest. He specified that 100 marks were to be shared between 'x puellis pro earum maritagiis' [ten young girls for their marriages], while immediately after this, he bequeathed 10 marks to 'filie Henrici Spelly ad eius maritagium' [the daughter of Henry Spelly for her marriage].[55] Elias Spelly's will contains a number of bequests to his poor neighbours and 'consanguineos'; thus it seems likely that Henry Spelly's daughter was a relative of his, although perhaps a distant one. Yet although she may have come from a much humbler background than her wealthy and prestigious kinsman, she was unlikely to have been destitute or poverty-stricken. It is also evident that the other ten anonymous women who were to receive dowry money were expected to be of a similar status to this woman, as the amount of 10 marks which they would ultimately receive once the money had been equally distributed was the same as the amount left to her. It may be noted that while Elias expected the bequests to go to ten women who had insufficient means to raise a dowry, he did not specifically state that they were to be 'poor' as was often the case with this type of bequest. It seems evident, therefore, that the women to whom such charitable bequests for dowries were

left could range from the very poor to those of relatively humble status who lacked the necessary funds to marry into their own social grouping.

Whatever the case, a study of the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century wills in the Great Orphan and Great Red Books reveals that group dowry bequests remained the most popular form of charitable provision made for women by male testators throughout the period, the percentage increasing slightly after 1450. Although falling a little in the 1470s, it could still be found readily enough well into the sixteenth century, as evidenced by the 1532 will of Robert Thorne, founder of the grammar school at St. Bartholomew's, who left the generous sum of £50 'towardes the mariage of pore maydens in London' and the same 'towardes the mariages of poure maydens in Bristowe', although the number of women to be helped in this way was not specified.[56] Similarities can be found elsewhere: in York, for example, Patricia Cullum has found that provision 'for the marriages of young women, particularly poor young women, tended to become more common from the middle of the fifteenth century'.[57] Yet from the Bristol evidence it is also apparent that alongside this trend, other forms of charitable bequests made to poor women by male testators declined. For instance, in the last quarter of the fourteenth century and the early years of the fifteenth century, widowed women as a group feature fairly prominently as the recipients of male bequests, almost as much as young women who were left money for their marriages. Reginald Taylor, for example, left to each of twenty-four 'mulieribus viduis pauperibus' [poor widowed women] 2d 'in argento', 'vnam tunicam de nouo' [a new tunic] and 'vnum par sotularum' [a pair of shoes].[58] In a number of cases, the two groups of women are placed together in male wills as joint recipients, as in the will of John Stoke (d. 1381), who left a sum of money to be divided 'inter pauperes viduas et puellas ville Bristol' [for poor widows and young girls of the town of Bristol] and that of Walter Frompton (d. 1388), generous benefactor to St. Stephen's church, who specified that his goods were to be

divided into four, the second part 'in maritagiis pauperum iuuentularum et viduarum sustentacionibus' [for the marriages of poor, young women and the support of widows.][59] However, it is noticeable that after 1400, poor widows as a group are mentioned much less often by male testators, and in the last two thirds of the fifteenth century not at all. Furthermore, although men continued to leave dowry bequests to individual women throughout the period, it is noticeable that other types of bequests to individual women who were not seemingly family or servants also appear to have dried up. These included such bequests as those left by Richard Byddeston in 1393 to Matilda Barstaple of 'iii elia de rubio pannum lanum ad faciendum eis 1 togam' [three ells of red woollen cloth to make her one gown], and William Warmynstere, who in 1414 left a gown to 'vxori Roberti Riggewey in mercato' [the wife of Robert Riggewey in the market].[60] This trend is of interest if a comparison is made with female wills where the opposite thing can be said to have occurred, with more individual women being mentioned.

There is no easy answer as to why bequests to these last two groups of women should have declined in male wills while the payment of dowries continued, even increasing after 1450; but the trend may, in part, have been related to or affected by social and economic upheaval as much as changes in religious and philanthropical thought, and the fact that women, particularly those from the poorer classes, perhaps faced fewer economic and employment opportunities as the fifteenth century wore on. It can be argued that the decline in economic opportunities had become apparent by the third decade of the fifteenth century in Bristol, when we no longer find bequests to 'widows' as a group in male wills. The Weaver's Ordinance, forbidding women other than family members to practise the trade, dates from 1461, thus the effect and possible perceived threat of women's presence in the workforce must have been felt some decades earlier.[61] Jeremy Goldberg, writing of York and Yorkshire in this period, has suggested that 'as economic recession bit deeper

into the urban economy', women were 'forced increasingly...into positions of dependency'. Thus, women may have felt a greater need to marry in order to gain a decent standard of living, or to avoid falling into destitution, and the charitable provision made for poor women in male wills may merely have been a reflection of this phenomenon.[62] However, linked to this, the trend may also be revelatory of the psychological effects upon the mentalité of a patriarchal society in a changing economic climate. It was not so much that widows or other groups of individual women were seen as no longer needing or as being less worthy recipients for charity in the eyes of male testators, but that young, unmarried women were seen as the most essential or requisite group of needy women to provide for, not because they actually were more needy than other groups of poor women, but because women's single status and female independent living in a period of economic change may have been viewed as potentially threatening. Such a situation may not have been viewed as so undesirable or as having the potential for disturbing the status quo in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth centuries, when there may have been greater economic and employment opportunities, but in the economic downturn which was becoming apparent in some places by the 1430s, the situation may have been perceived as more ominous or threatening to the established order of things. Thus the necessity or maintenance of dowries for women to marry, their 'natural' vocation, may have assumed a greater prominence. Perception rather than actuality may have been the keynote here.

The decline in bequests to certain groups of poor women, along with the rise or consistency of dowry bequests, can also perhaps be linked to the drop in bequests to other groups of women in the urban community such as nuns and hospital sisters, which, as argued elsewhere, may reflect an increasing suspicion of 'unsupervised' groups of women, or those separated from the mainstream in some way. Further, it also coincides with the fall in the number of single and married women making wills by the third decade of the fifteenth

century, which may point to a loss of independence or a curtailment of women's freedom in these matters. Is it possible that these trends affecting women from different social strata, the poor and the wealthier will-making classes, were related, reflecting a generally negative change in attitudes towards women's role and their standing in society? Apart from the economic situation, it is possible that other factors such as religious dissension or controversy (in Bristol, for instance, the spread of Lollardy and attempts to combat it in the 1440s), may also have hardened the attitudes of authorities and élites, consciously and unconsciously, as regards anything that might seem to threaten the social fabric and harmony of the community.

The trends apparent in the wills of Bristol male testators are the more interesting because they provide some contrast with the charitable bequests left to their own sex by female testators, which suggests that social and economic change or upheaval effected a different response from both men and women to the provision of charitable largesse, particularly as regards the female sex. The following arguments apply mostly to widowed women, who make up the majority of testatrices, as in the wills of the single women and those of the married women, which date from before 1420, it can be seen that poor women as a group are not singled out. In fact, the poor, sick or needy in general are not mentioned at all in the wills of the single women. It is not clear why this should have been the case, as it is evident that two of them at least were of reasonable means and had seemingly free disposal of their goods and property. However, as this is only a very small sample, we should be cautious of drawing firm conclusions as to the charitable habits or inclinations of wealthy, unmarried women. The wills of married women, as stated previously, tended to be concerned primarily with the disposal of property that they had brought with them into the marriage, which was almost always willed back to their blood relatives rather than to charitable causes, although a few left small general bequests to the poor to pray for their souls. It was not necessarily

that married women were less charitable than widowed women, but the lack of provision in their wills may reflect the possibilities either that as married women, they had less freedom of manoeuvre over how or to whom they could leave their goods and money, or simply that they expected their husbands to deal with such arrangements in their wills. It may also be recalled that a number of the married women who made wills do not appear to have been of élite status, as was usually the case where female will-making was concerned, and may therefore have had less money to leave for such purposes. Furthermore, neither the wills of single nor of married women mention as many individual women by name as do the wills of widowed women, something which is, I feel, of some importance when discussing female charitable giving.[63]

In the wills of widowed women in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, a slight tendency can be detected for the leaving of bequests to particular or specific groups of poor and needy women, but rather than leaving money for the marriges of poor young virgins, the bequests were either left merely to 'mulieribus pauperibus' or to female inmates of hospitals, as was the case in the 1407 will of Alice Wodeford, who left 2d to 'mulieribus pauperibus domus siue hospitali Sancti Johannis Baptiste extra portam de Redclyue'.[64] It may be noted that this institution housed both men and women, but only the women were mentioned by Alice. Some bequests could be quite specific, as in the 1408 will of Alice's contemporary, Katherine Calf, in which she instructed that 'tredecim pauperes mulieres die sepulturis mee, in hospitio meo, ad mensam sedentes habeant esculenta et poculenta sufficientia' [on the day of my burial, thirteen poor women sitting at the table in my house should have sufficient food and drink] and that they should each have 'vnum denarium ad orandum pro anima mea' [one penny to pray for my soul]. Further, the length of russet cloth that was to be laid over her hearse at the mortuary offices and mass, was to be given, after her burial, to 'pauperissime mulieri quam

executores mei poterunt in lecto suo iacenti iuenire propter debilitatem aerogotationem, cum panno lineo ad faciendum sibi camisam' [the poorest woman that my executors can find lying in her bed on account of infirmity and sickness together with a linen cloth to make her a shift/smock].[65] The description suggests that these women were aged and perhaps widowed, although this is not specifically stated. However, it is noticeable that none of the group bequests in female wills were to poor women for their marriages. From the Bristol evidence, it may well be argued that male charitable giving, particularly the leaving of dowries, reflected male perceptions of women as being defined primarily or most obviously by marital status, something which is less evident in the charitable provision made by women for their own sex, although there is some evidence to suggest that this may have changed towards the end of the period.[66] I do not intend to imply that in general women did not leave sums of money to provide for dowries for poor women. Indeed, Rosenthal, in his research on the charitable habits of the aristocracy, has found that female testators were more likely than men to leave money for 'the marriage of poor, but virtuous girls', although he does not state whether this changed over time.[67] This hints at the possibility of differences between the mentalities of noble and urban women in the late medieval period, and/or in the way in which the two groups were affected by or exposed to social and economic change. However, it may be noted, that group dowry bequests in the wills of Somerset gentry women are non-existent, dowries being left, it seems, only to family members, or occasionally servants, thereby showing some similarities with the Bristol evidence.[68] I am unsure as to whether these trends are peculiar to Bristol as an urban centre, for as far as I know no specific study of this type has been done for other large cities. Anne Sutton, in her essay on Alice Claver, silkwoman of London, notes that she left 40s for the marriages of poor women in her parish, but whether this was typical of the charitable bequests left by London women in general is unclear.[69] Patricia

Cullum, in her article on charitable giving, does not explicitly state that this was the case in York and Yorkshire, but the examples she gives suggest that it was primarily men who left dowry bequests for unmarried women, while women tended to leave bequests 'to young women of their acquaintance'.[70]

Unfortunately, as regards Bristol, from about the mid-1420s until the 1450s, we possess few female wills, so that it is difficult to establish how quickly changes might be said to have occurred in the nature of female charitable giving to the poor, but it is noticeable that, from the middle of the fifteenth century, the number of general or indiscriminate bequests left to 'pauperibus' or 'mulieribus pauperibus' becomes much less frequent, and, by contrast with male wills, such a decline does not seem to be parallelled by a rise in bequests to almshouse inhabitants. However, close scrutiny of female wills does suggest that more small bequests of money, clothing or household goods left to a greater number of individually-named women are to be found in those wills dating from the second half of the fifteenth century than in those made before this period. It may be noted that where the wills of husband and wife exist to compare, the women mentioned in the latter's will are often not to be found in that of the former, indicating that they were acquaintances personally known to the wife, but not to the husband. In cases where individual women are mentioned, it is not always clear whether the bequest was intended as an expression of charity, a commemoration of friendship, or both, although it is sometimes specifically stated that prayers were to be said for the donor's soul. It is evident that women were always inclined to mention more individuals, particularly individual women, in their wills than men, and it is likely that a number of personal legacies were motivated wholly or in part by charitable impulse. We may note, for example, the 1413 will of Juliana Richards, widow of a wealthy draper, who attached a lengthy appendix to her will which specified that various items of clothing were to go to the wives of William Goldsmyth, John Stephens, 'barbour', Nicholas Taillour, and John

Sherman, and to Margaret, wife of John Batter, Alice, wife of William Solas, Magot, wife of Hugh Coryour, Joan Backwell, wife of William Fourbour, and Christina Kynge.[71] Juliana gives little information about these women, but as they are not referred to in the main body of her will, where female friends and relatives are mentioned, it is perhaps unlikely that they fell into any of these categories. Their surnames indicate that they were not from fifteenth-century élite families, nor do they or others bearing those surnames appear to have left wills or any trace in other surviving records, so it may be that their social status was comparatively modest. Juliana mentions that one of the recipients was the wife of a barber, someone who might be of poor to moderate artisan status, but who would almost certainly be of a more humble social position than the wife of a draper.[72] However, as the status of these women is not distinctly defined as is the case with other female wills, this makes for difficulties not only in uncovering the nature and extent of female poverty or neediness and the charitable provision made for them, but also in measuring changes over time.[73] Even so, it does seem that many of the women named as legatees or recipients of small bequests do not fall or fit easily into the categories of kin, servants, apprentices or friends and acquaintances who moved within the same social circle as the testatrix, but who, from the occasional detail given by her, such as the occupation of the recipient's husband or father, appear to have come from more modest backgrounds, although not from actual or acute poverty. Thus, despite the difficulties in measuring charitable giving in this way, it strikes me that the two tendencies which can be detected in female wills, namely, the decline in bequests to the poor, and to poor women in particular, along with the marked increase in the number of bequests left to individual women, may be related, reflecting changes not only in the nature and distribution of female charity to poor women, but also in perceptions of the female sex in general. Yet, as it can be argued that, to an extent, female charitable impulses had always tended to take

such a personal, individualistic form, it is perhaps more correct to say that trends or tendencies already apparent in women's charitable impulses became more pronounced as time went on, rather than that they actually changed in nature.

In some of the later fifteenth-century wills, such as that of Joan (d. 1479), wife of Mayor Thomas Kempson, who left to each of several women seemingly unrelated to her 'vnum pannum vocatum le forste cloth', or that of Alice Wisby (d. 1485), widow of Nicholas, in whose will numerous women are named and left small bequests such as a gown, a silver spoon, or a ring, it is difficult to gather much information on the status or background of these women, as little is revealed about them.[74] The fact that the bequests were small or modest might be an indication that the women were poor, or poorer than the woman in whose will they featured, although not necessarily so. In Alice Wisby's will, the women were, perhaps, not likely to have been related to her, for Alice usually states if the legatee was a sister, daughter or 'in-law'. In other wills, however, there is more clue as to the possible social standing of the named women in relation to the testatrix. Agnes Hert, it will be recalled, left a lengthy will, specifying in some detail how and to whom, the numerous goods of her large house, shop and workroom, which she may have inherited from her husband, were to be distributed. Many of these bequests, sometimes asking for the prayers of the recipients, were legacies to family, servants and apprentices, but among those left to the latter two sets of people, which are grouped together in the second half of the will separate from the bequests to family, are a number of other bequests, some to men, but many more to women. They include women such as Margaret Coteller, to whom she left various household goods and bedroom furniture, including a 'fedurbed' and a 'lectum vocatum trockulbede cum pare lodicum' [bed called truckle bed with a pair of sheets], and others, who received more modest gifts. Joan Bownes was left 'tria cocliaria argentea' [three silver spoons], while Joan Clifford and

Alice Maddock, 'filie Johannis Maddock de Elvurton infra forestam de Deene', both received 'vnum annulum aureum' [a gold ring]. Katherine Simon was to have the value of 6s 8d 'in bonis' [in goods] and to Agnes, 'vxori nuper Johannis Robert', she left a 'togam de violett engreyned', along with 'vnam tunicam de skarlett, et 'vnam tabulam (?) de Flandria stantem in aula' [a tunic of scarlett, and a table (?) of Flanders standing in the hall].[75] There are indications that these women may have associated with or been related to some of her servants or apprentices, but they do not appear to have been part of her household.

What then, may have lain behind the increased tendencies towards the more individualistic and personal approach to charitable giving that it is possible to observe in the wills of Bristol laywomen? Were they part of more general trends that have been detected elsewhere in medieval England by other historians, namely a decline in giving to the poor *en masse,* along with a tendency to bestow charitable largesse more discerningly? In her study of charity in Cambridge in the late medieval period, Miri Rubin has suggested that 'suspicion was cast on those relieving poor folk whose identity and quality of life were unknown'.[76] Such an inclination may have been at work here, assuming a greater prominence as the fifteenth century advanced. In particular, it may not have been disconnected to possible ideological shifts and altered perceptions of women and their role in society wrought by social and economic change, which caused their life-styles and activities, along with other groups of poor and disaffected, to be scrutinized or judged more carefully. In this climate, female donors or testatrices may have felt more inclined, or felt it to be more necessary, wise or prudent to ensure that the recipient of largesse or a legacy was someone with whom they were personally acquainted and therefore known to be 'deserving' of such goods or charity. This suggests that women themselves may have adopted or internalized prevailing attitudes towards their own sex, informed by patriarchal authority and ideology.

Is it also possible that changes in religious and devotional thought and activity, principally late-fifteenth-century shifts towards a more private, personal or individualistic religion, which some historians have argued occurred, also played a part?[77] The increased circulation of devotional books, the greater use of private pews in churches and of chapels in individual homes, may have led to a retreat into the world of household and private chapel, a world to which women were anyway accustomed to spending a good deal of their time, and which was increasingly removed or distant from the groups of beggarly and disaffected poor outside it.[78] Whatever the case, it seems clear that female charitable giving to other women differed from that of their male counterparts. It can be argued that the latter was less personal in character, although it, too, appears to have changed over time. From the Bristol evidence, it is clear that the leaving of dowries for women of marriagable age was always the most popular form of charitable provision made for women in male wills, but whereas, in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, male testators also left money to 'viduis' [widows] as a group, and occasionally, bequests other than dowry bequests to various individual women, by the 1440s money was being left, for the most part, only to women who fitted into the first of these categories, which may explain the apparent rise in dowry bequests. This was, perhaps, partly due to social and economic change which altered women's role and status, or, more accurately, altered perceptions of their role and status, hence affecting the charitable provision made for them.

Finally, how far can the features that can be detected within the charitable impulses of the Bristol laity be said to have been peculiar to that city or to the large urban community generally? Were they simply part of trends or movements that occurred nationwide? It has already been pointed out that there may have been differences between the charitable inclinations or preferences of noble or gentry women and those women belonging to urban

élites, although the wills of Bristol women and those of Somerset gentry women show some similar features in this respect. As regards women living in other urban centres such as York, for example, some trends similar to those which occurred in Bristol appear to have been detected by historians such as Jeremy Goldberg and Patricia Cullum. Where work has been done on charitable giving in other towns such as Norwich and Hull, it has not concentrated on provision made specifically for women, or the differences between male and female charitable giving to the poor. Thus, more research needs to be done before it can be concluded whether or how far those changes or shifts discussed above can be described as general features relating to charitable provision made for women, or whether they were more characteristic of urban society in the late medieval period.

NOTES

1. Wright, *Book of the Knight of La-Tour Landry*, p. 135.
2. Patricia Cullum, 'And hir Name was Charite: Charitable Giving by and for Women in Late Medieval Yorkshire', in Goldberg, *Woman is a Worthy Wight*, pp. 182-211 (p. 186).
3. The quoted phrase is from Joel Rosenthal, *The Purchase of Paradise: Gift Giving and the Aristocracy, 1307-1485* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), p. 10.
4. For recent general accounts of medieval hospitals see Martha Carlin, 'Medieval English Hospitals', in Lindsay Granshaw and Roy Porter (eds.), *The Hospital in History* (London and New York: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 21-39, Orme and Webster, *The English Hospital*, and Carole Rawcliffe, 'The Hospitals of Later Medieval London', *Medical History*, 28 (1984), pp. 1-21.
5. See Chapter 2, pp. 80-95 above.
6. Maclean, *Lives of the Berkeleys*, II, 89.
7. Thomas Scott Holmes (ed.), *The Register of Nicholas Bubwith, Bishop of Bath and Wells, 1407-1424. Part I.*, SRS 29 (1914), p. 173. The entries and records relating to the Bristol hospital sisters and their sources can be found in Hugo, 'Traditional Houses', in *Medieval Nunneries of Somerset*, pp. 5-6.
8. This information is to be found in Alfred E. Hudd, 'The Hospital of St. Katherine, Brightbow near Bristol', *PCAC*, 1 (1888), pp. 257-76 (p. 260), who used the writings of a Father Grant. However, I have found no firm evidence with which to substantiate this.
9. Neale, *William Worcestre*, pp. 98-9.
10. Rev. W. Rich Jones and Rev. W. Dunn Macray (eds.), *Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland during the Middle Ages: Charters and Documents illustrating the History of the Cathedral, City and Diocese of Salisbury in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (London: HMSO, 1891), pp. 172-3.
11. Great Orphan Book, f. 181v; Burgess, *Pre-Reformation Records of All*

Saints', pp. 135-6.

12. Bickley, *Little Red Book*, II, 215. I have been unable to find any other information on John Farcy; see, however, John Latimer, 'The Hospital of St. John, Bristol', *TBGAS*, 24 (1901), pp. 172-8, who argued the case for the hospital's foundation having occurred in the thirteenth century.

13. Neale, *William Worcestre*, pp. 224-5; see also M. D. Lobel and W. H. Johns (eds.), *The Atlas of Historic Towns*, 2 vols (London: Scholar Press, 1975), II, maps 2 and 3.

14. Great Orphan Book, f. 72^{v}.

15. See, for instance PRO, PCC 25 Vox (PROB 11/14), ff. 194^{v}-195^{r} for the will of Egidea Swayne, and Great Orphan Book, f. 43^{v} for that of William Temple.

16. Scott Holmes, *Register of Nicholas Bubwith*, pp. 145-6.

17. For the visit by Henry VI see Nicholls and Taylor, *Bristol Past and Present*, II, 115-6.

18. See Leland, *Itinerary*, V, 93, and Thomas John Manchee, *The Bristol Charities, being the Report of the Commissioners for inquiring concerning Charities in England and Wales, so far as it relates to the Charitable Institutions in Bristol*, 2 vols (Bristol: Manchee, 1831), II, 333.

19. Great Orphan Book, f. 116^{v}.

20. See T. Duffus Hardy (ed.), *Rotuli Chartarum in Turri Londinensi Asservati 1199-1216*, 2 vols (London: Record Commission, 1833-4), I, 175; see also Rev. C. S. Taylor, 'Ancient Bristol Documents. No XI.', *PCAC*, 3 (1897), pp. 25-34 (p. 29).

21. Great Orphan Book, f. 69^{r}.

22. *CPR 1461-7*, p. 444.

23. See Chapter 3, p. 119 above. A brief history of the hospital in the medieval period can be found in Roger Price, *Excavations at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, Bristol* (Bristol: Redcliffe Press, 1979); see also Margaret Holmes, 'St. Bartholomew's Hospital, Bristol: some New Material', *TBGAS*, 74 (1955), pp. 180-7.

24. See Strong, *All Saints' Calendar of Deeds*, p. 21, Burgess, *Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints'*, p. 6, and Leech, *Topography*, p. 2.

25. Great Orphan Book, ff. 181^{v}, 21^{v}.

26. Burgess, *Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints'*, p. 135.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

28. See Manchee, *Bristol Charities*, I, 30-8.

29. Hicks, 'Piety of Margaret, Lady Hungerford', pp. 23, 36. For the statutes see J. E. Jackson, 'Ancient Statutes of Heytesbury Almshouse', *WAM*, 11 (1869), pp. 289-308.

30. See p. 184 above.

31. The present-day almshouses are a Victorian reconstruction of the original, but still provide accommodation for the elderly. They are owned and administered by the Bristol Municipal Charities. The chapel, which now stands on the north side, originally stood on the south.

32. *CPR 1405-8*, p. 410.

33. Great Orphan Book, ff. 56^{v}, 74^{v}.

34. PRO, PCC Marche 23 (PROB 11/2a), f. 83^{r}.

35. The long and interesting will of John Bount can be found in the Great Orphan Book, ff. 95^{r}-96^{r}. For information on Isabel see Chapter 2, pp. 59, 63 above.

36. *CPR 1405-8*, p. 410.

37. Neale, *William Worcestre*, pp. 106-7; Wilfred Leighton, 'Trinity Hospital', *TBGAS*, 36 (1913), pp. 251-87 (p. 276.)

38. The account book, now in the possession of the Bristol Municipal Charities, who took over the administration of the institution in 1836, records the rents owing to the hospital and, occasionally, details of the benefactions left for maintaining the almsmen and women in food and clothing and for

repairing the almshouse buildings. Extracts are printed in Leighton, 'Trinity Hospital', pp. 266-76.

39. Bliss and Twernion, *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers*, V, 245. It may be noted that ultimately, the almshouse was not endowed by will.

40. Leighton, 'Trinity Hospital', pp. 259-60. This confusion may also account for the representation of the shield of Isabel's own family, the Derbys, to be found on the front of the present-day building on the north side of the street.

41. Great Orphan Book, ff. 114^{v}-115^{r}.

42. Isabel's brass is a nineteenth-century replica of the original, which was last known to have been in the hands of the Bristol Municipal Charities, but whose whereabouts is now unknown; see Cecil T. Davies, *Monumental Brasses of Gloucestershire* (Bath: Kingsmead Reprints, facsimile edition, 1969), p. 28.

43. Great Orphan Book, f. 97^{v}.

44. See Leighton, 'Trinity Hospital', pp. 266-75.

45. Canynges's almshouse is mentioned in his will; see Great Orphan Book, f. 197^{v}. For Spencer's foundation see Veale, *Great Red Book. Part IV.*, pp. 68, 102-3, and Neale, *William Worcestre*, p. 225. See the Great Orphan Book, f. 181^{v} for John Gaywode's will which mentions Foster's almshouses, and Manchee, *Bristol Charities*, II, 4, for St. John's almshouses.

46. The present-day almshouses at the top of Christmas Steps, known in Foster's time as 'Stepe Street', are Victorian, although the original chapel, partly altered, survives.

47. Foster's will is registered at PRO, PCC 9 Dogett (PROB 11/9), ff. 206^{r}-207^{r}.

48. Veale, *Great Red Book. Part III.*, pp. 175-81.

49. For Esterfeld's will see PRO, PCC 26 Holgrave (PROB 11/14), f. 206^{v}, and for Scholastica 12 Ayloffe (PROB 11/19), f.95^{v}.

50. Carlin, 'Medieval English Hospitals', p. 24; Michael Hicks, 'Chantries, Obits and Almshouses: The Hungerford Foundations 1325-1478', in Barron and Harper-Bill, *Church in Pre-Reformation Society*, pp. 123-42 (p. 134).

51. On male and female life expectancies see C. Russell, 'How many of the Population were Aged?', in Michael M. Sheehan, *Aging and the Aged in Medieval Europe* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), pp. 119-27; see also Shulamith Shahar, *Growing Old in the Middle Ages* (Routledge: London and New York, 1997), pp. 34-5.

52. See Thomson, 'Piety and Charity', p. 185 and Cullum, 'And hir Name was Charite', pp. 198-9. Both have stated that this was a popular type of bequest, although Thomson does not differentiate between bequests made by male and female testators.

53. Great Orphan Book, ff. 17^{r}, 109^{r}.

54. *Ibid.*, f. 78^{r}.

55. *Ibid.*, f. 30^{r}.

56. *Ibid.*, f. 262^{r}.

57. Cullum, *And hir Name was Charite*, p. 198.

58. Great Orphan Book, f. 5^{r}.

59. *Ibid.*, ff. 22^{v}, 69^{r}.

60. *Ibid.*, ff 40^{v}, 124^{r}.

61. See Chapter 1, p. 29 above.

62. Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle*, p. 337. See also his earlier comments on the topic in the same work, pp. 155-6.

63. See Chapter 1, pp. 33-50 above for discussion of the wills of single and married women.

64. Great Orphan Book, f. 111^{r}.

65. *Ibid.*, f. 109^{v}.

66. There is a bequest of half a pipe of woad left in the will of Joan Ryngston to Agnes Anthony, her servant, whom she describes as 'senglewoman', an epithet which may indicate that it was Agnes's status as an

unmarried woman which singled her out as a recipient of such largesse. Although it is unusual to find women referred to by such a term in Bristol wills, Jeremy Goldberg has noted that this label was applied to women in a number of Norwich and York records by the mid-to-late fifteenth century and suggests, on the strength of this, that 'a woman came to be seen less in respect of her own status as an individual and more in relation to marital status and possible spouse': see *Women, Work and Life Cycle*, p. 118.

67. Rosenthal, *Purchase of Paradise*, p. 118.

68. This is true not only of the female wills transcribed by Weaver, *Somerset Medieval Wills 1383-1500*, but also those to be found among the printed records of the small urban borough of Bridgwater, although the latter only constitute a small number: see Dilks, *Bridgwater Borough Archives 1377-1465*, 4 vols, and Dunning and Tremlett, *Bridgwater Borough Archives 1468-1485*.

69. Anne F. Sutton, 'Alice Claver, Silkwoman (d. 1489)', in Barron and Sutton, *Medieval London Widows*, pp. 129-42 (p. 140).

70. Cullum, 'And hir Name was Charite', pp. 198-9.

71. Great Orphan Book, f. 123v.

72. On the profession and status of barbers see Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*, pp. 32, 47, 100-1.

73. This difficulty in measuring or even identifying properly women's charitable giving to other women is noted by Cullum, 'And hir Name was Charite', p. 183.

74. Great Orphan Book, f. 211r; PRO, PCC 23 Logge (PROB 11/7), f. 179v.

75. PRO, PCC 10 Vox (PROB 11/10), f. 73v.

76. Rubin, *Charity and Community*, p. 299.

77. See, for instance, Colin Richmond, 'Religion and the Fifteenth-Century English Gentleman', in Barrie Dobson (ed.), *The Church, Politics and Patronage in the Fifteenth Century* (Gloucester: Sutton; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984), pp. 193-208 (pp. 198-200).

78. On the Bristol laity and private chapels see Chapter 4, pp. 156-7 above.

CHAPTER 6

'...TO THE HONOUR AND WORSHIP OF ALMIGHTY GOD AND HIS SAINTS': LAY DEVOTION TO THE CULT OF SAINTS IN BRISTOL

The above quote, taken from the section in the All Saints' church book listing the benefactions of the 'good-doers', refers to the new rood loft commissioned by Alice Chester which was to be filled with twenty-two saintly images, a monument to her belief, and those of the other parishioners of All Saints', in the efficacy of venerating the saints.[1] Such veneration was an integral part of religious life all over Western Europe in the Middle Ages. Numerous representations depicting scenes from saints' lives were to be found in the wall-paintings and stained glass windows that adorned cathedrals, parish churches and chapels, structures which also contained within them many saintly images and altars. There was a vast body of literature, didactic and recreational, concerned with lives of the saints, the most well-known collection being the *Legenda Aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine written in the thirteenth century, which many later hagiographical accounts used as their source. In England, in the later Middle Ages, versions of saints' lives could be found in the writings of both secular and clerical writers such as Chaucer, John Lydgate and John Capgrave.

A number of the most favoured and popular saints such as John the Baptist and Mary Magdalene were biblical characters, although a number of them, such as Barbara, Blaise, Christopher, George, Katherine, and Margaret were mythical figures or of dubious historical authenticity, many of whom, particularly the virgin martyr saints, had supposedly faced and miraculously overcome hideous sufferings and tortures as a result of their unswerving Christian beliefs. These saints were venerated in countries all over Western Europe, although individual countries also had their own revered saints, men and women who had usually lived less spectacular lives, but who nevertheless achieved a great reputation for devout and holy living, and at whose tombs miracles were often reputed to have taken place. St. Hugh of Lincoln and St.

John Cantilupe, whose shrine lay in Hereford cathedral, bishops of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries who acquired large cult followings after their deaths, can be cited as English examples. Others were known and held in great regard in a particular region such as Cuthbert in northern England, and John of Bridlington and William of York in Yorkshire.

The popularity of the saints can be attributed to a number of factors. Through their sanctity, often attained or made evident through death-defying struggles with the human or supernatural foes of Christ, they were powerful intercessors, bridging the gap between the mortal and the divine. On a more human level, they were assuagers of physical and emotional suffering and misfortune, helpmates to men or women in their life struggles, and of course, different saints could be called on by them for help and comfort in different situations. There was room for personal preference and an individual may well have inclined towards a particular saint because of an empathy, no matter how slight, with his or her life-style and sufferings. Obviously gender, life experiences and pious inclination could influence a person's draw towards a saint, but this is not to deny that the saint in question could attract the devotion of or hold different meanings for a variety of groups or individuals. It can be argued that women living in a patriarchal society could identify with virgin martyrs in their battles against secular authority, seeing them as symbols of empowerment. There is evidence to suggest, for example, that Margery Kempe was not immune to such influences or ideas in her clashes with the various secular and ecclesiastical powers that she encountered on her travels.[2] However, it is equally possible that the same saints could be seen as worthy exemplars for the female sex by a patriarchal society, for in their total capitulation to God's will, they showed complete submission and obedience, virtues always considered particularly desirable in a woman. It is not always evident that men or women gravitated more towards saints of their own sex, and in this respect a study of Bristol is a case in point. However, I feel the

issue is of some significance, and I have drawn upon it thoughout the chapter. It can also be argued that corporate worship or veneration of a certain saint could affect the way in which he or she was viewed by the various different groups or individuals living within a particular community, the saint holding a different appeal or acquiring different meanings as well as or apart from those typically or usually associated with him or her. In this instance, political and economic factors can also be said to have come into play, affecting the nature of lay devotion within the community. These issues are raised and discussed in the section on the cult of St. Katherine in Bristol.

As regards Bristol specifically, the evidence comes from a variety of sources, most obviously wills, which frequently record requests for burial before an altar or for a light to burn before an image of a saint, but also the inventories and benefaction lists to be found in church books, where details of anniversary services or perpetual chantry foundations can be found. There are, of course, difficulties with the evidence, as it is often impossible to gauge the depth or exact nature of a man or woman's devotion to a given saint. There may have been an element of convention in some of the bequests and some saints may have been mentioned in wills primarily because it was their images which stood in a testator's parish church. St. Ewen's, for example, had images of St. Ewen, St. John the Baptist, St. Katherine and St. Margaret, so naturally parishioners tended to mention these saints rather than any others. Even here, however, there was some choice, with St. Katherine receiving much more attention than the other three. The depth of an individual's preference or devotion can sometimes be assumed if, for instance, such an individual is known to have dedicated to a particular saint a new altar or even a chapel that he or she had caused to be built, as in the case of John Knappe, who commissioned the building of the chapel of St. John the Evangelist upon Welsh Back in the late fourteenth century.[3]

Unfortunately, as regards the Bristol laity, we possess no literary evidence

like the collection of fifteenth-century female saints' lives composed by the Austin canon, Osbern Bokenham, often at the request of various female members of the East Anglian gentry. In this work, he not only states in the 'prologue' or 'prolocutorye' to an individual life for whom he wrote that particular tale, but in a number of cases something of the nature or strength of his patron's devotion.[4] Nevertheless, there is enough evidence to enable us to probe into various aspects of saintly devotion within medieval Bristol, particularly as it relates to certain female saints, and the differing perceptions of men and women as to the latter's role and meaning. A brief section has been included on Christocentric and Marian devotion, followed by a section on the popularity of male saints, and two further sections on the female saints, Katherine and Anne. St. Katherine enjoyed huge popularity within medieval Bristol, partly as a result of economic and, to an extent, political factors, in part peculiar to the city. This, I believe, had important consequences for male and female veneration of the saint. The cult of St. Anne in Bristol began to acquire a greater following towards the end of the fifteenth century with the chapel of St. Anne at Brislington, then a village outside of Bristol but now within it, becoming a major centre of pilgrimage.

Christocentric and Marian Devotion

As elsewhere, requests for burials or for lights to burn before images and altars dedicated to the Virgin and to Christ, sometimes referred to as St. Saviour or the Body of Christ, occur more frequently than those left to other saints' altars, at least before 1450. As regards the latter, such devotion was partly a corporate affair. We may note the popularity of the Corpus Christi day celebrations within the city, which are vividly recounted in Margery Kempe's book in about the year 1417, where she describes how 'þe prestys born þe Sacrament abowte þe town with solempe processyon, wyth meche lyth and gret solempnyte' which caused her to be 'ful of terys and deuocyon, wyth

holy thowtys & meditacyon', while further references to the feast and procession can be found in the church books of All Saints, St. Ewen and St. John the Baptist well into the fifteenth century.[5] However, the Bristol testamentary evidence reveals a clear decline in the number of bequests to or requests for burial before such altars, although this is perhaps explained by the rise of new Christocentric devotions, such as the related cults of the Holy Name and the Five Wounds, which are mentioned in some wills from 1470 onwards, and which it is clear from entries made in the church book had a thriving following among the wealthy of the parish of All Saints.[6]

The Virgin, as the mother of Christ, whose help was 'more efficacious than an ordinary saint and a direct line to God'[7], was frequently mentioned by both men and women. All the city's churches had an altar dedicated to her, usually within a Lady chapel, and some, such as St. Mary Redcliffe, had more than one, but there is no evidence to suggest that veneration of the Virgin in Bristol ever reached the same levels that it did in the city of York, for example, where an increased intensity to her cult in the fourteenth century has been noted.[8] Even so, a number of religious and parish guilds were dedicated to her, the most powerful and prominent of these being the fraternity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary which met in a large and ornate chapel of the same name on Bristol bridge. According to William Worcester, the chapel which comprised a crypt, a chapel, 'aulam. cum officijs' [hall with offices], 'altam cameram' [upper room] and 'altiorem cameram' [topmost room], was dedicated in February 1361, and an entry in the Great Red Book states that it had been founded by Edward III and his queen, Philippa.[9] Although Worcester states that the chapel contained representations of benefactors and their wives 'in fenestris vitreatis' [in the glass windows], including most notably Agnes and Elias Spelly, both noted for their piety, the guild attached to the chapel was a male-only one, comprising the élite of the town, and unsurprisingly, therefore, was not mentioned in female wills.[10]

However, although the chapel and fraternity continued to be mentioned in the wills of the male élite until the early 1500s, for some reason the popularity of both appears to have declined after about 1430. Whether this was related to the general decline in the number of bequests to Our Lady altars is unclear. Although the Virgin continued to be invoked in the preambles of wills throughout the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, in the second quarter of the fifteenth century there was a noticeable decline in the number of Bristol men and women asking to be buried before her image or altars dedicated to her in her many different guises. Indeed, from this period, as regards male testators, St. Katherine can be said to have been mentioned more often, although exactly why this should have been the case and whether it was entirely peculiar to Bristol, I am unsure.[11] It may not necessarily mean that there was a decline in the Virgin's popularity, for there are indications that this was not the case. We may note, for example, the tabernacle in All Saints' church commissioned by Alice Chester sometime between 1470-85, which contained three scenes from the life of the Virgin.[12] Furthermore, other religious fraternities dedicated to the Virgin were founded in the fifteenth century, the most well-patronized being the chapel and fraternity of St. Mary or Our Lady of the Bellhouse, attached to St. Peter's church. The earliest reference I have found to it occurs in the will of Maud Esterfeld in 1492, while the 1502 will of Mathew Cachemay gives more details, referring to 'the brothyrs and sisters of the fraternite of the seyd chapell late begoune in the foreseyd chyrche of Seynt Peter'. It was mentioned in the wills of testators more frequently from about 1500 and appears to have quickly accumulated a degree of wealth in terms of property and land, as evidenced by a number of surviving deeds from the early sixteenth century.[13] It is of interest to note that a number of late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth-century female wills which mention the chapel of St. Mary of the Bellhouse also mention the chapel of St. Anne in the Wood at Brislington, evidence perhaps of a combined devotion to

St. Anne and the Virgin. It may therefore have been the case that the cult of Mary did not decline in Bristol, but that the cults of mother and daughter became entwined as that of St. Anne became more popular, as is discussed in more detail below.[14]

Male Saints

A greater number of male than female saints are mentioned in the wills of the Bristol laity, which may be related to the fact that almost all of the former group had a church dedicated to them within the city. Apart from St. Mary Redcliffe, only St. Werburgh's was dedicated to a female saint, and it does not seem that she acquired a cult following within the city, even amongst the laity of that parish.[15] The evidence of wills, inventories and other material reveal that the most venerated male saints were St. John the Baptist and St. Thomas, although as regards the latter, it is not always evident whether it was St. Thomas the Apostle or St. Thomas the Martyr, that is, St. Thomas à Becket of Canterbury, who is being referred to. St. Thomas's church, which had originally been a chapel belonging to Bedminster church, stood in one of the southern parishes, but it is not known which St. Thomas the church had originally been dedicated to, as the wills of the late medieval Bristol laity contain bequests to a church of St. Thomas the Apostle and to a St. Thomas the Martyr, although it is clear that both groups are referring to the same structure.

St. John the Baptist was one of the most popular saints of the Middle Ages. Apart from the church of St. John the Baptist, a number of other churches possessed altars dedicated to him, including All Saints', St. Stephen's, St. Thomas's, Temple, and St. Werburgh's, while the wealthy guild of St. John the Baptist, founded in 1401 by John Sharpe and John Thorpe, members of two fifteenth-century mercantile families, met in the south aisle of St. Ewen's church.[16] Although ostensibly a craft guild, that of the Merchant Taylors, its

historian, Francis Fox, suggests that the religious element was, in fact, the stronger of the two, and it may be noted that a number of those testators who left bequests to the guild included it together with other guilds that were known to be purely religious in character, to whom they had also left bequests.[17] John Frere, for instance, in 1419, left money bequests to the fraternities of St. John the Baptist and St. Katherine in Temple church, but also 'fraternitati Beate Marie extra hostium Templi' [to the fraternity of the Blessed Mary outside the entrance of Temple], while William Spencer, in 1494, left to the fraternities of St. John the Baptist and St. Katherine, but also 'ad sustentacionem fraternitatis Assumpacionis Beate Marie' [to the support of the fraternity of the Assumption of the Blessed Mary] and that of the 'fraternitatis cripte Sancti Nicholai' [the fraternity of the crypt of St. Nicholas], otherwise known as the fraternity of the Holy Cross, which met in the church of St. Nicholas.[18] The membership of the guild of St. John the Baptist was wide-ranging, including many members of the mercantile élite, but also those from humbler social groupings, as is clear from testamentary evidence where bequests are left to 'the poor' of the guild. The book of the proceedings of the company, dating from 1401, lists the gifts of the 'sisterne', as well as the 'brethrene' although it is not clear in what capacity the former belonged to it, whether as the wives, widows and daughters of male members or otherwise.[19] The guild was rarely mentioned in female wills, although, as already discussed, the saint was clearly popular with Bristol laywomen and levels of devotion to his cult remained fairly constant among them, something which the prominence of the guild may have contributed to.[20]

St. George also appears to have enjoyed a certain vogue in Bristol, although bequests to altars dedicated to him only seem to occur in male wills, and for the most part those of wealthy merchants, who at one time or other comprised part of the governing élite. In a number of other towns in the late medieval period, the cult of St. George, England's patron saint, was often closely

associated with the ruling groups or classes. In Norwich, for example, St. George's day was celebrated with great fervour, while the guild of St. George there, founded at the end of the fourteenth century, became a leading civic guild, being joined to the city government in 1452.[21] The chapel of St. George in Bristol, reputedly founded by the wealthy merchant Richard Spicer in the late fourteenth century for the use of the burgesses, adjoined the medieval guildhall where the original guild merchant, and later the corporation, met.[22] The Little Red Book contains a memorandum of 1466 listing the goods belonging to the chapel, which shows it to have been a rich and lavishly-furnished place, although the donors of these gifts are not named.[23] Worcester asserts that there was a 'Fraternitas dignissima Mercatorem et marinariorum Bristollie dicte capelle pertinencia' [most worthy fraternity of merchants and seafarers of Bristol attached to the said chapel], although the only other reference to such a fraternity appears to be that which occurs in the 1464 will of William Myryfeld who bequeathed to it the sum of 3s 4d.[24] The chapel was mentioned by a number of leading citizens, including John Woderoue, who in 1382 left instructions that a chaplain was to celebrate 'in capella Sancti Georgii', and John Leycestre, Mayor in 1425 and 1431, who in his 1436 will left money 'ad emendacionem et reparacionem capelle Sancti Georgii, Bristol' [to the improving and repairing of the chapel of St. George in Bristol].[25] A few churches possessed altars dedicated to the saint, which again, appear to have attracted only male bequests. The abovementioned John Leycestre asked to be buried in St. Stephen's church 'in capella Beate Marie ibidem subtus ymaginem Sancti Georgii' [in the chapel of the Blessed Mary there below the image of St. George], while William Canynges founded chantries at both the altars of St. George and St. Katherine in St. Mary Redcliffe church.[26] It may be noted that although St. George never attained the popularity of St. Katherine within Bristol, his cult, like hers, was much venerated and had close associations with the male élite who exercised political

power within the community. Such associations may go some way to explaining the saint's apparent lack of appeal to female testators, as they were excluded from any political power-sharing.[27]

The church of St. Nicholas stood on the corner of St. Nicholas's Street and the High Street, and had attached to it a crypt where the guild of the Holy Cross met.[28] Chapels dedicated to the saint were also to be found in the churches of St. Mary Redcliffe, St. James, St. Philip and St. Jacob, Temple, and St. Thomas.[29] However, despite this, and the fact that the activities of his feast day are described in some detail in Rickart's Kalendar,[30] perhaps testifying to its importance within the city, only a very small number of bequests to altars and images of St. Nicholas can be found in the wills of Bristol testators, although these are split evenly between men and women. Other saints such as Anthony, Blaise, Clement and Stephen are mentioned only occasionally, and it is surprising, perhaps, that the cult of St. James, to whom a priory church stood in the Horsefair, did not attract more of a following, considering that Bristol was the main point of embarkation for pilgrims from England who were heading for the shrine of St. James de Compostella in Spain.[31] Local saints such as Brendan, Jordan, or, slightly further afield, Dunstan, were mentioned barely at all in wills, something which Norman Tanner has also found to be the case when studying the bequests of Norwich testators regarding local East Anglian saints.[32]

The Female Saint as a Symbol of Exclusion within the Urban Community: the Veneration of St. Katherine in Late Medieval Bristol

It may be noted that, with the possible exception of St. Anne, the female testators and benefactors of late medieval Bristol did not tend to show particular preferences for female saints.[33] In fact, although some female saints such as Margaret, Sitha, Ursula and Wilgefort feature very occasionally in wills, deeds, and church inventories, it is only St. Katherine and St. Anne who are mentioned with any frequency, and it is to discussion of their cults within

the city that I should now like to turn.

In the numerous accounts of her life written in the Middle Ages, St. Katherine, the legendary fourth-century Alexandrian martyr, is portrayed as a young woman of great beauty, virtue and wisdom, who overcomes the erudition of fifty learned philosophers sent by the Emperor Maxentius to dispute with her, and who suffers torture, and ultimately martyrdom, for her faith. She came to be the patron saint of scholars and philosophers, but also of knights and young women, and, because of her association with the wheel that had been devised to torture and kill her, the patron saint of spinning and associated crafts. However, her appeal was not restricted exclusively to these groups, for she became one of the most popular of medieval saints within Western Europe. Numerous chapels and altars were dedicated to her, and her image could be found in parish churches on screens, wall-paintings and in stained glass windows. Her intercession as a virgin martyr was considered to be particulary efficacious, and it has been argued that to medieval people she was often seen as being the most important intercessor after the Virgin through her bethrothal and marriage to Christ.[34] She could, of course, appeal equally to both men and women for a variety of reasons. For some women, she could serve as a symbol of empowerment through her reputation for learned disputation whereby she outshone 'alle men lyuende',[35] and there are indications that some pious fifteenth-century women viewed her in this light. It appears to have been St. Katherine that Margery Kempe had in mind when she found herself frequently being confronted or questioned, and not always unwillingly so, by both secular and ecclesiastical authorities regarding the legitimacy of her activities and the regularity of her conduct. Certainly, the saint often appeared to her in visions along with other female saints, and it is of interest to note that those in positions of authority unapprovingly perceived that she was attempting to cast herself in the saint's mould. When, for instance, she was imprisoned in Leicester on suspicion of Lollardy, her

answer to the Mayor's question regarding her parentage and background prompted the cynical response from him that "'Seynt Kateryn telde what kynred she cam of and ȝet ar ȝe not lyche for thu art a fals strumpet"'.[36] More locally, we may note the bequest left in the 1460 will of Dame Eleanor Hull née Malet, of Enmore, Somerset of 'vijd. in worship of Seynt Kateryn', the only saint mentioned in her will.[37] As a fifteenth-century translator of religious texts, Eleanor may well have identified with St. Katherine as a patron of scholars and learning, finding in her example a way of justifying or legitimizing her own attempts at scholarship, in a world which did not generally or openly encourage women to partake of such activities.[38]

However, by studying the cult of St. Katherine within a large urban community like Bristol, it can be argued that those things she symbolized or could be seen to symbolize in a religious or devotional sense, as helpmate, intercessor, or beyond this, a figure of empowerment for certain groups or individuals, could be affected, obscured, changed, or could merely assume a greater complexity as a result of political, social and economic factors, in particular, by the degree and the way in which she was venerated by those who had the most access to political and economic power. I consider this to have been responsible for possible differing perceptions of the saint by men and women, as the latter, living in a patriarchal society, were certainly less politically, and for the most part, less economically powerful than men. From the late fourteenth century, St. Katherine was easily the most frequently-named saint in male wills after the Virgin and Christ, and indeed, after 1400, more male testators asked to be buried before altars dedicated to her than to the Virgin. Many of the city's churches possessed a chapel bearing her name, while the majority had within them an altar dedicated to her. There was also, of course, the aforementioned hospital of St. Katherine founded in the early thirteenth century, which stood near Brightbow bridge in the suburb of Redcliffe. It is not known why Thomas Berkeley chose this dedication for the

hospital, but it may be an indication of the growing importance of the saint's cult within the city.

To probe further into these issues, it is necessary to look in more detail at the nature of St. Katherine's popularity within Bristol, a popularity which in contrast, perhaps, to other places within England and on the continent, did not really decline throughout the fifteenth century[39], and which was inextricably linked to the city's economic position as an important centre of cloth production and export. In this respect, Bristol fitted into the wider picture, being part of a major cloth-producing region which comprised the surrounding counties of Somerset, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire, along with parts of Dorset and Worcestershire, all of which exported much of their product through the port. In Somerset, which formed a large part of Bristol's hinterland, the cult of St. Katherine was a fairly significant one, although it cannot be said to have achieved the same degree of popularity that it enjoyed in Bristol. Similarly, in most of the smaller local urban centres, such as Bridgwater and Wells, whose economies also greatly depended on the making and export of cloth, it does not seem to have attracted the same level of devotion from the laity of these communities that it did in their larger neighbour.[40] It is also of interest to note that in those other parts of the country which comprised significant cloth-producing areas with large urban centres at their core, such as Yorkshire and East Anglia, the cult of St. Katherine, despite the saint's association with weaving and the cloth trade, appears to have been less heavily cultivated. In York, although her image could be found in many churches, she does not appear to have attracted more attention than many other saints.[41] In Norwich, at the centre of the cloth-producing counties of Norfolk and Suffolk, Norman Tanner has found that she enjoyed only 'a modest cult' behind various male saints and the female saints, Anne and Margaret.[42] Why then, does the saint appear to have achieved such prominence in Bristol, over and above that of other saints, and more so than

in the surrounding region, and perhaps, than other cloth-producing areas of the country? The phenomenon may have been related to the nature of Bristol's growth entirely as a centre of trade and commerce, so that any saint having close connections with one of its major exports would necessarily become elevated above others. However, it may also have lain in the fact that the saint was much venerated and her popularity cultivated by those men who belonged to the city's ruling élite in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the importance and significance of which is discussed below.

Many of the city's occupations were a part of or connected with the trade, including that of the wealthy drapers who sold and exported the finished cloth, and those of the fullers, tuckers and weavers, who, while sometimes enjoying considerable wealth and prosperity, were usually of less exalted status.[43] It was the last-named of these who had as the patroness of their guild St. Katherine. It is not known when the guild, whose hall was sited in St. Thomas's street but whose chapel was in Temple church, came into existence, although its historians, Fox and Taylor, refer to a nineteenth-century inscription which was attached to the south wall of the chapel, and which stated that the '"Chapell and a piece of ground thereunto belonging (was) granted in the reign of Edward I to the Company of Weavers for their use for ever, 1299"'.[44] However, they were unable to find any historical authority for this, and the earliest authentic reference to the guild appears to be a deed of 1384 which assured 'sixty days indulgence to all who prayed for the good estate of the brothers and sisters of that fraternity, and for all the souls departed from the same fellowship'.[45] The craft and religious elements of the guild appear to have been inextricably intertwined, and it may be noted that, as was the case with the fraternity of St. John the Baptist discussed above, in wills where it was mentioned it was usually grouped together with guilds known to be purely religious in nature. The very wealthy but ill-fated merchant, Robert Sturmy, of the parish of St. Nicholas, for example, who

served as mayor of the city in 1403/4, left the sum of 6s 8d to both the 'fraternitie of þe chapel of Seint Kateryne in Bristowe' and to the 'fraternitie of the þe chapel upon the Brigge of Bristowe', the latter being the guild of the chapel of the Assumption of the Blessed Mary on Bristol Bridge.[46] Similarly, William Canynges left sums of money to the fraternities of St. John the Baptist and St. Katherine in Temple church, but also to the 'fraternitati Commemorationibus Omnium Animorum' [fraternity for the Commemoration of All Souls] in St. Mary Redcliffe church.[47] As mentioned previously, some craft guilds could have a purely religious side, and it may have been the case that some lay people were linked to it in this way.[48] The numerous bequests that the guild attracted from men of far greater wealth than the weavers is striking, and it can be said that in the late fourteenth century and throughout the fifteenth it was easily the guild most frequently mentioned in wills or patronized by the wealthy male élite, which must have contributed to its importance and prestige.[49] A number of these men were drapers and wealthy clothiers, such as Peter atte Barugh or Borough who served as sheriff in 1386, and Thomas atte Haye, sheriff in 1390, and a vast exporter of cloth to Portugal, Bayonne and Ireland.[50] Along with William Warminster, sheriff in 1396/7, William Bogham, and Nicholas and John Gyllyngham, they founded, in 1392, a perpetual chantry of St. Katherine in the chapel dedicated to her in Temple church which attracted bequests throughout the fifteenth century. In 1395, the same men granted 'two shops and gardens in Temple Street with other property' for a chaplain to pray for the king, founders and their heirs, and 'the brotherhood and sisterhood of the fraternity of St. Katherine'.[51] These men, along with others who showed allegiance to the guild, such as the aforementioned Robert Sturmy and John Gaywood, who pursued a number of shipping ventures in the second half of the fifteenth century with the younger William Canynges, although having strong associations with the cloth trade, were also merchants who traded in and

exported many goods. Canynges himself mentioned the fraternity in his will and founded a perpetual chantry at St. Katherine's altar in St. Mary Redcliffe church.[52] Thus, it is clear that its members and those who patronized it included many men of the élite who moved in the same circle and knew one another well. It seems likely that they exercised considerable control over the running of the guild, since it was they who donated to it extensive property and gifts. Although it might be argued that these men had little in common with craftsmen and artisans, it is possible to detect a degree of paternalism on the part of many of the more prosperous members of the guild towards the less wealthy who belonged to it. Both Thomas att Haye in 1393 and Peter atte Borough in 1396 showed concern for poor weavers, fullers, tuckers and their families, while John Gaywode, in his will of 1471, left money to 'pauperibus fraternitatis Sancte Katherine' [the poor of the fraternity of St. Katherine].[53] Apart from those who left bequests directly to the guild, there were numerous others who remembered the guild's chapel in Temple church, which may indicate membership or a strong association on their part. Some of these—such as William Le Ele, who in 1405, left to the chapel of St. Katherine 'vnum ciphum misserum argenteum apparatum et deauratum' [a cup of mazer, silver gilt with apparatus/equipment] which was never to be sold, and John Sely, who left 20s 'operi capelle Sancte Katerine, virginis' [to the work of the chapel of St. Katherine the Virgin]—were parishioners of Temple parish who might be expected to remember the chapel in their wills.[54] Others, however, were from parishes elsewhere in the city and do not seem to have had any specific links with the cloth trade or associated industries, one such being Robert Hynde, possibly a goldsmith, of Holy Trinity parish who left 6s 8d 'vsum capelle sancte Katerine' [to the use of the chapel of St. Katherine].[55]

The guild evidently included women members, for a few documents mention that prayers were to be said for the brothers and sisters belonging to it. A deed of 1495, for instance, records a gift of rent from a loft and curtilage in

Temple Street by John Fulbroke, a cloth exporter, and Isabel, his wife, to 'John Cantelowe and others who engage for themselves and their heirs that the donors and certain of their relations shall be enrolled with the names of the "brethren and sistern" of the chapel of St. Katherine, and there daily prayed for forever.'[56] It is difficult to know in what capacity the women joined, whether as the wives or widows of merchants or craftsmen, or otherwise, but there is no record of women donating property purely on their own account.[57] Furthermore, the guild and/or its chapel were rarely mentioned by women in their wills, with only two of them actually mentioning the former. Alice Chester, in her will of 1485, left two torches to burn 'ad altare fraternitatis Sancte Katerine de Temple', while Joan Geffereys in 1495 bequeathed 'to the vse of the chapell and brethered of Seint Kateryne within the seid church of the Temple founded, a nutte harneysyd with syluer with a couer'.[58] Margaret Young *alias* atte Berugh, wife of the aforementioned Peter, asked to be buried 'in capella sancte Katherine virginis' beside her husband, although this may have been at the latter's behest, or may simply reflect her desire to be buried beside her first husband.[59] Similarly, Joan Kempson, of Temple parish, wife of Thomas, Mayor in 1470/1, did not mention the guild, but left 6s 8d to the chapel of St. Katherine in her 1479 will.[60] These women were or had been married to men who had some connection with the cloth industry, although the origins of Joan Geffereys appear to have been humbler than those of the other three, so that their allegiance to the guild or its chapel may have stemmed from these associations. Two of them, Geffereys and Kempson, lived in Temple parish, and so might be expected to bequeath to the chapel within their parish church. Generally, however, the paucity of bequests to the guild and chapel in Temple church by women of the élite class provides some contrast with the considerable number left by their male counterparts, and mirrors the general pattern of bequests left to altars or images of the saint within the city.

Such images and altars could be found in most Bristol churches. St. Ewen's church possessed images of the Virgin, St. Ewen, St. Margaret and St. Katherine, and it was the last-mentioned of these that attracted the most attention, as evidenced by one of the inventories dating from 1455. This lists the benefactions donated to her altar by a number of eminent men such as John Pembroke, who gave 'al the apparayl longyng to seynt Kateryn ys Auter with hyr fygur steyned ther yn' while the 'ij boces Of copur and ouer and ij condelstykkes of laton' belonging to it were given by Richard Batyn 'yn wurshyp of the same seynt.' John Pembroke, from a wealthy shipowning family, also donated one of the two 'baner clothes of seynt Katheryn', the other being donated by the previously-mentioned John Nancothan.[61] Richard Batyn presumably was a member of the wealthy merchant family of that name who came to prominence in Bristol in the second half of the fifteenth century.

The church of Holy Trinity had altars dedicated to the Holy Cross and St. Thomas the Martyr, but again it was St. Katherine's altar which received the majority of bequests, such bequests usually being more generous or specifying a more complex type of memorial service to be performed there than those left to the altars of other saints, which often received nominal sums and the simple instructions that prayers were to be said for the soul of the departed. John Swell, for instance, in his 1389 will, asked to be buried 'coram altare Sancte Katerine' and that 'post decessum Margarete, uxoris mee' [after the decease of Margaret, my wife], the same altar should receive 'vnum calicem cum toto apparatu' [a chalice with all its apparatus/equipment] for the use of a chaplain to celebrate there, and 'vnam pictam tabulam' [a painted prayer tablet/portable altar].[62]

The church of St. Mary-le-Port possessed a chapel and altar dedicated to St. Katherine which attracted a number of requests for burial. The chapel also had a fraternity attached to it, as evidenced by the 1383 will of Nicholas Chepstowe of St. Nicholas's parish, who left 2s to the 'fraternitati beate

Katerine in ecclesia Beate Marie ad portam Bristoll'.[63] However, I have found no further references to this fraternity, so its date of foundation and the length of its duration remain unknown. Several members of the prestigious Innyng family were also buried there. In 1418, Adam Innyng, town bailiff in 1403/4, desired to be buried 'in ecclesia Beate Marie de Foro coram altare Sancte Katerine virginis, iuxta corpus Matilde, nuper vxoris mee ibidem' [in the church of the Blessed Mary-le-Port before the altar of St. Katherine the virgin, beside the body of Maud, late my wife], and required a fit chaplain to celebrate at the said altar 'per quatuor annos' [for four years] for his soul, that of his wife and all the faithful dead, for which he was to receive the sum of £20.[64] Innyng's son, William, who died in 1447, also asked to be buried before the altar of St. Katherine 'near his father', while a deed of 1457 records the lengthy instructions of his brother John of St. Leonard's parish, for a mass to be said annually 'in capella Sancte Katerine' for the souls of 'Ade Innyng et Katerine nuper vxoris sue, patris et matris mei, predicte Johannis Innyng' [Adam Innyng and Katherine, late his wife, my father and mother], various brothers and their wives, and himself.[65] This would seem to indicate a family tradition of devotion to the saint transmitted from one generation to the next. The high status of the family and their closeness to the city's governing circles should be kept in mind in light of what is argued below, regarding the appropriation of St. Katherine as a symbol by the late medieval civic élite of Bristol, as I would argue that this played a part in the family's veneration of the saint.

As regards other places of worship, the chapel of St. Katherine in St. Stephen's church which housed her image attracted many bequests from such prominent wealthy men as Simon Canynges in 1413 and Thomas Beauflour in 1426.[66] St. Mary Redcliffe possessed images of the Virgin, St. Blaise, St. George, St. Katherine, St. Nicholas, St. Simon, and St. Stephen, but again that of St. Katherine was mentioned most often by testators. The will of William

Canynges in particular, can be mentioned in this respect. He desired to be buried ' in loco quem constructi et feci in parte australi eiusdem ecclesie iuxta altare sancte Katerine vbi corpus Johanne, nuper uxoris mee, est sepultum' [in the place which I have constructed and made on the south side of that church, next to the altar of St. Katherine, where the body of Joan, late my wife, is buried]. Canynges had already in 1466 established two elaborate chantry foundations in the church, one before the altar of St. Katherine and another before that of St. George, another saint patronized by and closely associated with members of the city's élite, so that certain aspects of his piety, namely, his veneration of certain saints, can be said to have been considerably influenced or informed by his position as a member of the civic ruling body.[67]

Two things become clear from this survey of lay devotion to the cult of St. Katherine in Bristol, the first being the popularity the saint enjoyed among men belonging to the wealthy and élite groups in society over and above devotion to other saints, both male and female. A number of these men such as att Borough, Canynges, Gaywood, Sturmy, and those of the Innyng family are known to have served in positions of high civic authority, or, if they had not, were nevertheless, wealthy and prominent men. At the least, this leads us to assume that there existed a rich and powerful male élite network bound together in part by their association with the saint. The second thing to note is the disparity in the number of male and female bequests to the altars, chapels and guilds dedicated to the saint. The earlier-mentioned bequests of Alice Chester, Joan Gefferies, Joan Kempson and Margaret Young to the guild and chapel of St. Katherine in Temple church make up the bulk of those women who showed some degree of devotion to or interest in the saint's cult. The difference between the large number of testamentary bequests along with the gifts recorded in church inventories left by men, and the handful left by women, is, I think, particularly striking, as it was almost always the case, with

the exceptions of St. George and St. Anne, who were mentioned far less often by testators anyway, that the bequests left to male and female saints' altars by both men and women usually showed little if any disparity between them.[68] Furthermore, St. Katherine was a popular saint with both men and women in the Middle Ages, and there is no evidence, as far as I know, to suggest that in general she was more popular with members of the male sex. Certainly, as regards the Somerset testamentary evidence, although the number of lay people who mentioned St. Katherine was by no means as high as it was in their larger neighbour, it varied little between men and women. There must, therefore, be a reason for this phenomenon in Bristol, and it strikes me that it was perhaps connected to the 'appropriation' of the saint by the politically and economically powerful male élite, their veneration of her cult being a reflection of this. I should therefore like to draw attention to the arguments of David Sacks concerning devotion to St. Katherine within the city, although he himself is not principally concerned with the differing experiences and perceptions of men and women regarding her appeal and significance.

Sacks stresses how the veneration of St. Katherine and the activities associated with her feast day could serve to promote 'social unity' within the city, encouraging the 'harmony' and 'cohesion' of the large borough community. He suggests that St. Katherine's day, where the saint 'usually appeared in person with her assistants—sometimes children, or commonly, lesser members of some gild—to demand tribute from the leading citizens, usually the civic authorities' was an event 'of ritual submission which gave social inferiors an opportunity to exact a symbolic homage from their betters', so that the 'treats they received from the leading men gave recognition that these notables were part of the same community as the players'. By these acts, he argues 'the city's governors subordinated themselves symbolically to Katherine's divinely-inspired authority and, therefore, not only to the virtues she exemplified, but to the community she represented'.[69] These events he

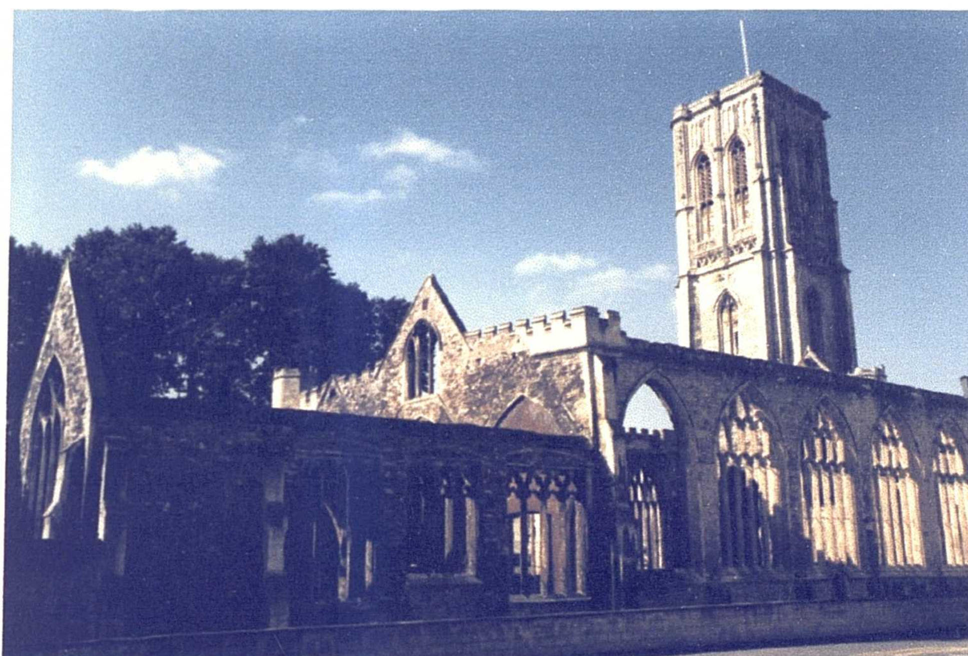
equates with the rituals that took place on the eve of St. Katherine's day in Bristol and the feast day itself. On St. Katherine's Eve, the 'Maire and Shiref and their brethren' walked 'to Seynt Katheryns Chapell within Temple church, there to hire theire evensong, and from evensong to walke vnto the Kateryn halle, theire to be worshipfully receiued of the wardeyns and brethern of the same; and in the halle theire to have theire fires, and their drynkyngs with Spysid Cakebrede, and sondry wynes.' On returning home in the evening, 'the Maire, Shiref, and the worshipfull men' made 'redy to receyue at theire dores Seynt Kateryns players, making them to drynk at their dores, and rewardyng theym for theire playes.' I have been unable to find any other specific reference to St. Katherine's players, or information which refers to or explains their role and activites in more detail, but it could well be, as Sacks implies, that these were the men of poorer status, the lesser members of St. Katherine's guild, perhaps, who demanded tribute from the élite before whom they performed. On St. Katherine's day itself, 'the Maire, Shiref, and theire brethern', were 'to be at the Temple churche, and fro then to walke with the procession aboute the Towne, and retorne to the seide Temple churche, there to hire masse, and offre.'[70] This event, the final mass and offering, Sacks describes as a period when 'the members of the Corporation were finally joined together with their fellow citizens from the parish of Temple each in his legitimate place as members of the larger Christian commonwealth.' By these means, celebration of St. Katherine's Feast in Bristol, and by implication the general veneration of St. Katherine within it, helped to confirm 'the principle of unity proclaimed by the late medieval borough community', which Sacks describes as 'a territorial unity that defined the boundaries of the community; a jurisdictional unity that linked its members together in a set of common rights and priveleges; and a social, or even spiritual, unity that was the ideal of their common enterprise.'[71]

How successful the St. Katherine's day celebrations actually were as a means

of promoting the desired peace and unity within the city is difficult to know with certainty, but it is more important, I believe, to acknowledge that this was the light in which the celebration, and, following on from this, the whole cult of St. Katherine, was viewed by the wealthy male élite. The saint was seen not only as a symbol of unity, but as a way or means of promoting unity. This perhaps lay behind her immense popularity and the patronage of her guild by these men. Not only did devotion to the saint encourage or foster the maintenance of a strong network between them, but, because of their position at the apex of a large urban community over which they obviously wished to maintain order and harmony, it may also have ensured that St. Katherine came to be seen by them as a symbol and therefore a means of maintaining that harmony. Thus it can be argued that the political environment combined with social and economic factors coloured veneration of the saint within Bristol as much as the religious. All of this may have assumed a greater significance in a large urban borough where there was, perhaps, greater potential for disorder than in smaller or more rural communities if order and unity were not maintained, or if the various social groupings within that community became too disassociated or fragmented from each other. Importantly, however, and this is the crux of my argument, the combination of the political and the religious in this respect can be said to have had important implications for women who were, of course, excluded from governing or having any influence within the political community. Thus it can be argued that the 'territorial' and 'jurisdictional' unity which Sacks speaks of, as promoted by devotion to the cult of St. Katherine and the celebration of her feast day in Bristol, had different implications for women living within the same community, as they could not inhabit the same social territories and spaces as men, and, while subject to the same jurisdiction as them, experienced its workings in a different way. Thus excluded, they would not necessarily have experienced or felt themselves to be part of the 'spiritual unity' that grew from the veneration

Right: Sketch of a stained-glass window containing an image of St. Katherine, once in St. Katherine's chapel, Temple Church. Reproduced from Alfred E. Hudd, 'Some Old Glass from Temple Church, Bristol, representing St. Katherine of Alexandria and other Saints', *Proceedings of the Clifton Antiquarian Club*, VI (1908) Plate VIII. Figure 1 (facing p. 62)

Fig. 10



The ruins of Temple Church bombed during the second world war *Fig. 11*

St. Anne's Well, Brislington *Fig. 12*

of St. Katherine within the city. In fact, although in the eyes of the late medieval, male civic élite, she may have been viewed primarily as a unifying figure bonding them with the wider community over which they governed, such wholesale appropriation of the saint in this manner could, I believe, have considerably affected women's perception of her, causing them to subconsciously disassociate or withdraw themselves from adherence to her cult. This may go some way towards explaining the small number of bequests left to Katherine altars by female testators and the disparity of bequests between men and women. Such an alliance between religion and urban politics, the latter being a world to which women had no access, may well have caused them to be excluded or alienated from devotion to a saint who in a number of ways could be seen as or could serve as a potential symbol of empowerment for the female sex. If, however, the cult of St. Katherine in Bristol attracted more male devotees than female, it can be argued that that of St. Anne, another hugely popular medieval saint, attained greater popularity with women, the possible reasons for which are discussed below.

The Cult of St. Anne in Medieval Bristol and the Chapel of St. Anne in the Wood at Brislington

John Leland, writing in 1536, described how '2 miles above Bristow was a commune *trafectus* by bote wher was a chapelle of S. Anne on the same side of Avon that Bath stondith on, and heere was great pilgrimage to S. Anne.'[72] He was, of course, referring to the thirteenth-century chapel of St. Anne in the Wood at Brislington, which stood near a holy well reputed to possess healing powers. With the existence of such a hallowed site so close to the city, it makes sense to take a brief look at the nature and extent of devotion to the saint's cult there, particularly as there is some evidence to suggest that by the end of the fifteenth century it had begun to attract the allegiance of a small number of élite women.

Within Western Europe, devotion to the cult of St. Anne, mother of the

Virgin, began to increase in the High Middle Ages and had become widespread by the end of the fourteenth century.[73] In England, the feast was granted official recognition in 1382, an event often associated with the arrival and honouring of Anne of Bohemia, queen of Richard II, and throughout the fifteenth century altars, chapels and fraternities dedicated to St. Anne, of both a religious and craft nature, proliferated, while numerous versions of her life were written or transcribed, perhaps more than for any other female saint.[74] Unlike the majority of saintly women, St. Anne was not a virgin martyr who suffered torture and persecution for her faith. As recent writing on the subject has emphasized, she was more multi-faceted as a religious symbol, and her appeal correspondingly broad in nature.[75] She could serve as an exemplar of a dutiful and obedient spouse, subservient to God's will, stoically enduring several years of childlessness before conceiving the Virgin, yet she could also be held up as the epitome of chastity, on account of her pious widowhood, and despite her three marriages. As a marriage saint, she was a symbol of fertility and her blessing could be invoked in prayers for help to conceive, while in her role as wife and mother she could be seen to stand for the cult of the family and the continuation of lineage, both of which would have held particular appeal for the noble and gentry classes, and for urban élites. Apart from her association with motherhood and the family, she was also revered by certain crafts and trades, being the patron saint of 'woodworkers, seamstresses and seafarers', as well as having associations with mines and vineyards.[76] Her appeal can thus be seen to have been all-encompassing, but may also have partly lain in her 'ordinariness' and the fact that her life experiences were less difficult to identify with, and her example easier to follow, than were those of the virgin martyrs who suffered hideous tortures and violent deaths for their beliefs, or those hermits of the desert who practised such asceticism and austerities in their efforts to live truly holy lives. It has often been argued that St. Anne held particular appeal for urban

élite groupings, as she and her husband, Joachim were traditionally reputed to have come from similar stock. A number of those who have studied the saint's appeal have suggested that she and her husband encompassed the values and ethos of the prosperous urban classes, even that they were 'merchant saints par excellence'.[77] Anne's life, combining marriage, motherhood, remarriage and widowhood, would certainly have been a familiar one to many women from wealthy urban families, and it may have been that her especial appeal to women lay in the fact that she enabled them 'to combine the idea of chastity with the married state', the latter being viewed as 'a necessary evil', but a second best to a life of perpetual virginity and the monastic vocation.[78] Indeed, in the next chapter, I argue that this was possibly a dilemma faced by both Maud Baker, wealthy benefactress of All Saints' church, and her step-daughter, Alice, informing both their life choices and their piety.

Few Bristol lay wills of the fourteenth century mention St. Anne, which is surprising perhaps, in view of the fact that the chapel of St. Anne in the Wood at Brislington had been in existence since the 1200s. Following the general trend in Western Europe, it seems that her cult became more popular in the fifteenth century, although among the laity of north Somerset and Bristol, it does not seem to have attracted anything like the same levels of devotion that it did in other areas of England, most notably East Anglia. Within St. Werburgh's, Bristol, there was a chapel dedicated to her, which must have been built some time around 1385, for the will of Walter Derby dated that year, requested burial 'in capella Sancte Anne nouo edificando' [in the chapel of St. Anne to be newly built].[79] Although he did not specifically state that this was the case, it is possible that he played a part in the commissioning of such a project or contributed money to the construction of the chapel. One of his two daughters, Alice, asked to be buried in that church in her 1419 will, and left two fine cloths, one to hang over the altar dedicated to the Virgin, and the other to hang 'super altare Sancte Anne eiusdem ecclesie' [over the altar of St.

Anne in the same church], which suggests that Alice was either acting out of filial associations or that the saint may have held a particular appeal for the Derby family.[80] She does not appear to have aroused the interest of the Warminsters, the family Alice married into, who from testamentary evidence clearly had stronger associations with the cult of St. Katherine. St. Anne was one of the five principle figures carved onto the new rood altar commissioned by Alice Chester in All Saints' church in the 1480s, and we may also note the request in the 1489 will of her relative, Joan Twynyho of Frome, for burial in the church of St. John the Baptist in that town 'at the end (finem) of the altar there, before the image of St. Anne.'[81] Joan was the daughter of the Thomas and Margaret Rowley buried in St. John's church, Bristol, and the fact that this request was made by a woman of Bristol origins further hints at the growth of the saint's popularity within the city. It is possible to argue that evidence of a growing adherence to the cult of St. Anne within Bristol and north Somerset in the fifteenth century was more apparent among women, although, given the relatively small number of testamentary bequests involved, we should be wary of drawing firm conclusions on this matter. Overall, there is no evidence of devotion to St. Anne gaining at the expense of other saints, as occurred elsewhere. Ellen Muller, for instance, writing of female saints in the fifteenth century, has suggested that around 1500 devotion to the cult of St. Anne increased while veneration of St. Katherine declined, although this argument may more accurately apply to the populations of the Low Countries on whom she based most of her research.[82] St. Katherine, for a variety of reasons discussed above, including her connections with the cloth trade and its associated activities, remained popular within Bristol throughout the fifteenth century and beyond. St. Anne, despite her status as the patron saint of a number of crafts and occupations, had no craft or religious guilds dedicated to her within the city, although both the guild of weavers and cordwainers are known to have donated, annually, a large wax candle to burn within the chapel

of St. Anne at Brislington.[83]

In the fifteenth century, the chapel saw a growth in pilgrim traffic to the shrine it housed. It had been founded a couple of centuries earlier by a member of the de la Warr family, lords of the manor of Brislington, who placed it in the hands of Keynsham Abbey, one of whose canons always served as chaplain there. It stood in a clearing near the aforesaid well famed for its medicinal properties, and is described by William Worcester in about 1480 as measuring nineteen yards by five yards, while supporting it were nineteen 'butterasses'. The two candles donated by the guilds of weavers and cordwainers apparently measured eighty feet from the floor to 'coperturam archuati volti' [the arched roof vault]. If Worcester's information is correct, this would have made the chapel a very tall building, and in all, a substantial structure. Inside, there were also '13. ceree quadrate' [13 square candles] which burnt 'coram imagine sancte anne' [before the statue of St. Anne].[84] Early twentieth century excavations also uncovered the chapel's rood-screen, which 'consisted of a vine cut in relief from solid freestone', the vine being traditionally associated with St. Anne because of her role as progenitor of Christ and the bearer of divine fruit.[85] Although it was founded in the thirteenth century, we know little of the chapel's history before the fifteenth, the earliest testamentary reference to it, as far as I have been able to tell, occurring in the 1392 will of John Beket, who left money to 'domino Ricardo, capellano Sancte Anne' [Sir Richard, chaplain of St. Anne's] to celebrate '1 trental'.[86] Surprisingly, perhaps, Margery Kempe did not mention the shrine in her reminiscences of her trip to Bristol, from where she set sail for St. James de Compostella in 1417, despite the fact that the saint sometimes appeared to her in her visions.

It is not until the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth that increasing mention is made of the site as a place of pilgrimage by the wealthy and great. During Henry VII's visit to the city in 1486, it is

recorded that he 'rode on pilgrimage to St Anne's in the Wodde'.[87] When he visited the region again in August 1502, his wife, Elizabeth of York, travelled with him, and her Privy Purse accounts record the sum of 2s 6d paid 'to the Kinges Aulmoner for the Quenes offring to Saint Anne in the wood besides Bristowe'. A later entry for the same August when the queen was residing at Berkeley may also be noted, for it states that the sum of 2s was paid 'to a seruant of M. Esterfeldes of Bristowe in rewarde fro bringing of a present of oranges and sukccades to the Queen to Berkely'.[88] Was this a reference to John Esterfelde, who served as mayor of Bristol several times before dying in 1507, or a relative of his? Such a link between the queen and the Esterfelds may be tenuous, but the entry is of some interest, for in her will of 1491, Maud, Esterfelde's second wife, left to the 'vsum capelle Sancte Anne iuxta Bristol in comitu Somerset, vnum alium annulum auri' [use of the chapel of St. Anne near Bristol in the county of Somerset, another gold ring], which suggests that she may have been a regular visitor there in her lifetime.[89] It is impossible to know the exact nature of Maud's devotion to St. Anne, but as a well-to-do merchant's wife who, judging by her will, was herself possibly married more than once, she may have identified with the life experiences of the saint on this level. It is perhaps worth reiterating that Maud was married when she made her will, as was the aforementioned Joan Twynyho who asked to be buried before St. Anne's altar in her parish church, this being a period when wills made by married women had become a rarity. This may, of course, be a coincidence, but we may speculate upon whether these women felt a particular affinity with Anne as a marriage saint at this stage in their life cycle. It is also likely that Maud's veneration of the saint and the shrine at Brislington was closely associated with her devotion to the Virgin. Her will certainly suggests a more than conventional attachment to the latter's cult on her part. She asked to be buried 'iuxta capellam Beate Marie de Belhous in ecclesia parochiali Sancti Petri, Bristoll' [next to the chapel of the Blessed Mary

of the Bellhouse in the parish church of St. Peter, Bristol], to which chapel she bequeathed 'meum anulum nuptialem' [my wedding ring]. Her husband John also asked to be buried there and there is evidence to suggest that husband and wife were members of the guild attached to the chapel of the Blessed Mary of the Bellhouse.[90] However, she further left 'vnum alium anulum auri vsum capelle Beate Marie situate in portico ecclesie parochiali Beate Marie de Redcliff, Bristol' [another ring of gold to the use of the chapel of the blessed Mary situated in the porch of the parish church of the Blessed Mary of Redcliffe, Bristol] as well as 10s 'ad renovacionem tabernaculi Beate Marie' [to the repair/restoration of the tabernacle of the Blessed Mary] in the church of St. Werburgh's.[91] It strikes me that it may have been the relationship between the two women and its associations with the matrilineal Holy Kinship, with its emphasis on the birth of Christ through the matriarchal line, that held significance for Maud. I should like here to draw attention to the arguments of Pamela Sheingorn, who, using artistic and iconographic evidence, has found that in the fifteenth century, pictorial representations of the Holy Kinship laid emphasis on the matrilineal descent of Christ, and the importance of St. Anne as matriarch, focusing 'on women as progenitors of the sacred' and 'on motherhood and on positive relationships among women.'[92] Is it possible that Maud Esterfeld's bequests therefore represent a similar belief in the power and importance of descent through the female line, and in the relationship between mother and daughter as a means of transmitting pious and devotional inclinations and behaviour?

Apart from Maud Esterfeld, a few other examples can be cited to support this argument. The benefactions of Alice Chester to All Saints' church, for instance, which included tabernacles and altar screens on which could be found representations of St. Anne and the Virgin as principal figures, hint at the possibility that the relationship between mother and daughter may have held particular significance for her.[93] As late as 1532, similar bequests to those

left by Maud Esterfeld can be found in the will of Joan Pernaunt, possibly one of the daughters of Maud Baker. She left 'a sayfour stone to the vse and behof of the chapell of Saynt Anne in the Wood' and another ring to 'the chapell of owr Lady of Belhowse in Bristowe', and also made reference to 'my ymage of owr Lady in tymber paynted and gylt.'[94] It has been stated that 'Anne's cult was an aspect of the cult of Mary' and there is no doubt that among the female laity of Bristol towards the end of the fifteenth century and into the sixteenth, there is some evidence of a joint devotion to their respective cults.[95] In the years leading up to the Reformation, the chapel of St. Anne in the Wood continued to receive a small number of bequests from the laity of Bristol and north Somerset. It also retained popularity with some members of the locally-based nobility, in particular, the Staffords, dukes of Buckingham, who held land and the castle at nearby Thornbury.[96] Over the centuries, the chapel eventually fell into disuse and decay, although a part of its walls may still have been standing in about 1880.[97] St. Anne's Well, however, still exists today, where an annual blessing takes place, and where a statue of the saint was erected nearby in 1996.[98]

NOTES

1. Burgess, *Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints'*, p. 16.
2. See p. 214 above.
3. For a description of the chapel see Neale, *William Worcestre*, pp. 146-7.
4. See, for instance, the 'prolocutorye' to Mary Magdalene's life in Mary Serjeantson, *Legendys of Hooly Wummen by Osbern Bokenham*, EETS OS 206 (1936), pp. 137-9.
5. Meech and Allen, *Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 107; Joseph Bettey, *Church and Community in Bristol during the Sixteenth Century* (Bristol: Bristol Record Society and University of Bristol, 1983), p. 6.
6. See Chapter 2, pp. 74-7 above.
7. Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 222.
8. Raine, *Mediaeval York*, p. xiv.
9. Neale, *William Worcestre*, pp. 166-7; Veale, *Great Red Book. Part 2.*, p. 201.
10. Neale, *William Worcestre*, pp. 142-3. The chapel was finally demolished in 1763, along with the bridge and the shops that stood on it; see Alfred E. Hudd, 'The Chapel of the Assumption on Old Bristol Bridge', *PCAC*, 4 (1897), pp 1-21 (p. 1).

11. By contrast, Raine's study of medieval York, shows that although St. Katherine was a popular saint there, the bequests left to her image or altar were by no means as numerous as those left to altars dedicated to the Virgin.
12. Burgess, *Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints'*, p. 15.
13. Great Orphan Book, f. 258^{v}; Mathew Cachemay's will is to be found at BRO, Fox Collection, 08153 (1) and (4), no. 66; for the deeds see nos. 38, 42, 44, 54.
14. See pp. 233-4 above.
15. For the dedication of St. Werburgh's and other Bristol churches see Basil Cottle, 'The Cult of Saints in Mediaeval Bristol', *Avon Past*, 5 (1981), pp. 5-13.
16. For a transcription of the ordinances in Latin and French, originally granted by Richard II and confirmed by Henry IV, see Veale, *Great Red Book. Part III.*, pp. 64-72.
17. Francis F. Fox, *Some Account of the Ancient Fraternity of Merchant Taylors of Bristol* (Bristol: Wright, 1880), p. 5. On the distinction (or non-distinction) between different types of guild see also Barron, 'Parish Fraternities of Medieval London' in Barron and Harper-Bill, *Church in Pre-Reformation Society*, p. 14, where she asserts that in the fourteenth century it was not always possible to separate true parish fraternities from craft guilds, and that some 'parish associations developed into trade fraternities and then later, into trade or craft companies.' Tanner, *Church in Late Medieval Norwich*, p. 68, has also suggested that the 1389 guild returns for Norwich show trade guilds to be 'organisations whose chief functions were religious rather than the exercise of economic or political control over crafts and trades.'
18. Great Orphan Book, f. 136^{v}; PRO, PCC 17 Vox (PROB 11/10), f. 132^{v}.
19. BRO, Muniments of the Merchant Tailors' Company, in particular, pp. 25, 28, for the gifts of Margaret Leche, Margaret Marsschefeld, Sebelye Holme and Margaret Wylmot, 'wydowe'. For the smaller and less lavish donations of other women see p. 39.
20. For related discussion of the popularity of the cult of St. John the Baptist among women see Chapter 2, pp. 60-1 above.
21. See Benjamin Makerell, 'An Account of the Company of St George in Norwich (from Makerell's History of Norwich MS 1737)', *Norfolk Archaeology*, 3 (1852), pp. 315-74.
22. Neale, *William Worcestre*, pp. 210-11.
23. Bickley, *Little Red Book*, II, 135.
24. Neale, *William Worcestre*, pp. 210-11; Veale, *Great Red Book. Part III.*, p. 156.
25. Great Orphan Book, ff. 2^{v}, 169^{r}.
26. See p. 222 above.
27. For related discussion on the cult of St. Katherine and her veneration by the city's élite see pp. 223-6 above.
28. The present church, which stands on the same site as the original, is eighteenth-century, but the medieval crypt, although closed to public viewing, still survives; see Bryan Little, *St. Nicholas' Church and City Museum* (Bristol: City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, 1980). The guild of the Holy Cross, which met in the crypt of St. Nicholas, attracted numerous bequests.
29. On the chapel of St. Nicholas which once stood within St. Mark's Hospital see Chapter 2, n. 82.
30. Toulmin Smith, *Kalendar of Richard Rickart*, pp. 80-1.
31. See also Chapter 2, p. 74 above for the cult of St. Christopher in All Saints' church.
32. Tanner, *Church in Late Medieval Norwich*, p. 84. By contrast, however, it may be noted that Hughs, *Pastors and Visionaries*, pp. 299-319,

has found that there was a huge growth in the cult of local saints in York in the medieval period.

33. It may be noted that this was not necessarily generally the case. For example, Wood, 'Poor Widows', in Barron and Sutton, *Medieval London Widows*, pp. 55-69 (p. 61), has found that the saints mentioned in the wills of the poor London women studied by him tended to be female ones. However, this does perhaps raise the question of how far wealth affected the choice of the testator.

34. Ellen Muller, 'Saintly Virgins: the Veneration of Virgin Saints in Religious Women's Communities', in Dresen-Coenders, *Saints and She-Devils*, pp. 83-100 (p. 84).

35. Serjeantson, *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, p. 182 (line 6687).

36. Meech and Allen, *Book of Margery Kempe*, pp. 111-2.

37. Barratt, *Commentary on the Penitential Psalms*, p. 303.

38. This has been suggested by Barratt, 'Dame Eleanor Hull: A Fifteenth-Century Translator', p. 88.

39. See p. 230 above for the decline of the popularity of St. Katherine in other parts of Western Europe.

40. Despite the area's importance as a centre of cloth production, the saint is not mentioned as frequently in the collection of Somerset wills compiled by Weaver or those to be found among the Bridgwater records transcribed by Bruce Dilks. Shaw, *Creation of a Community*, p. 180, makes little of the cult of St. Katherine in the city of Wells, suggesting that Andrew and Cuthbert were the most prominent saintly figures there. A possible exception was the city of Bath, twelve miles to the east of Bristol, where all five of the city's churches had an altar dedicated to her. The guild of St. Katherine met in the chapel of St. Katherine in the church of St. Mary-de-Stall in that city, and, as was the case with the Bristol guild of the same name, appears to have included many of the city's leading citizens. Thus it is possible that some of the arguments relating to the importance of the saint as a civic symbol in Bristol can be applied to its smaller neighbour, although we have few wills or other evidence with which to examine this in much detail.

41. For the bequests made to images in York churches see Raine, *Mediaeval York*.

42. Tanner, *Church in Late Medieval Norwich*, p. 84.

43. It should be noted that the wealth of weavers could vary. See Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*, p. 32, who suggests that 'although as a group, weavers were far from wealthy, the craft always supported a number of prosperous artisans who owned more than one loom and whose output during the year must have been a respectable size.'

44. Francis F. Fox and J. Taylor, *Some Account of the Guild of Weavers in Bristol, chiefly from MSS* (Bristol: George, 1889), p. 17.

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

46. PRO, PCC 14 Stockton (PROB 11/4).

47. Great Orphan Book, f. 200^{r}.

48. See n. 17 above.

49. On this subject see also David Harris Sacks, *The Widening Gate: Bristol and the Atlantic Economy, 1450-1700* (Los Angeles, Berkeley, London: University of California Press, 1991), p. 147.

50. On the pre-eminence of the drapers and the social set-up of Bristol's mercantile class see Carus-Wilson, *Medieval Merchant Venturers*, pp. 84-6; see also Sacks, *Widening Gate*, p. 147.

51. *CPR 1391-96*, p. 115; Fox and Taylor, *Guild of Weavers*, p. 13.

52. Great Orphan Book, f. 200^{r}.

53. *Ibid.*, ff. 37^{v}, 57^{r}, 181^{v}.

54. *Ibid.*, ff. 98^{v}, 122^{r}.

55. *Ibid.*, f. 205^{r}.

56. Fox and Taylor, *Guild of Weavers*, p. 16. Unfortunately, as far as I

have been able to tell, the originals of these are no longer to be found among the current collection of Fox manuscripts in the Bristol Record Office.

57. See B. P. Johnson, 'The Gilds of York', in Alberic Stacpoole, *The Noble City of York* (York: Cerialis Press, 1972), pp. 447-610 (pp. 452, 468), who argues from his research of York guilds that while craft guilds had 'a trading or manufacturing side', they also had 'a religious side which was often open to the wives and sisters of the Gildmen'. Thus 'sometimes the womenfolk, whilst not members of the craft guild, were paid-up members of the confraternity side'.

58. The wills of the two women are to be found respectively at PRO, PCC 14 Logge (PROB 11/7), f. 104^{r} and 15 Vox (PROB 11/10).

59. PRO, PCC 13 Marche (PROB 11/2a), f. 99^{v}. Att Berugh had been Margaret's first husband; she was still married to Thomas Young when she made her will.

60. Great Orphan Book, f. 211^{v}.

61. Masters and Ralph, *Church Book of St. Ewen's*, p. 5.

62. Great Orphan Book, f. 27^{r}.

63. *Ibid.*, f. 33^{v}.

64. *Ibid.*, f. 135^{v}.

65. Veale, *Great Red Book. Part II.*, p. 205; BRO, Deeds of St. Mary-le-Port, St/MLP/D50.

66. Great Orphan Book, ff. 120^{r}, 154^{v}.

67. *Ibid.*, f. 199^{v}. The ordinances and other documents relating to the foundation of the two chantries can be found in Veale, *Great Red Book. Part IV.*, pp. 35-7.

68. A survey of the wills in the Great Orphan and Great Red Books which mention guilds, chapels and altars dedicated to the saint gives a percentage of nearly 15 for male testators and less than 5 for women.

69. Sacks, *Widening Gate*, p. 141.

70. Toulmin Smith, *Rickart's Kalendar*, p. 80.

71. Sacks, *Widening Gate*, p. 142.

72. Leland, *Itinerary*, I, p. 136.

73. For a general history of the cult of St. Anne in Western Europe see Kathleen Ashley and Pamela Sheingorn, 'Introduction', in Kathleen Ashley and Pamela Sheingorn (eds.), *Interpreting Cultural Symbols: Saint Anne in Late Medieval* Society, (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1990) pp. 1-68.

74. A large number of these appear to have been East Anglian in origin, an area where St. Anne enjoyed great popularity.

75. See Ashley and Sheingorn, 'Introduction', pp. 1-6.

76. See Francesca Sautman, 'Saint Anne in Folk Tradition: Late Medieval France', in Ashley and Sheingorn, *Interpreting Cultural Symbols*, pp. 69-94.

77. Gail McMurray Gibson, 'Saint Anne and the Religion of Childbed: Some East Anglian Texts and Talismans', in Ashley and Sheingorn, *Interpreting Cultural Symbols*, pp. 95-110 (p. 101). On the importance of St. Anne to urban élites see Ton Brandenbarg, 'St. Anne and Her Family: the Veneration of St. Anne in Connection with Concepts of Marriage and the Family in the Early Modern Period', in Dresen-Coenders, *Saints and She-Devils*, pp. 101-27 (p. 120).

78 . Kathleen Ashley, 'Image and Ideology: Saint Anne in Late Medieval Drama and Narrative' in Ashley and Sheingorn, *Interpreting Cultural Symbols*, pp. 111-130 (pp. 118-9).

79. Great Orphan Book, f. 15^{r}.

80. PRO, PCC 53 Marche (PROB 11/2b), f. 198^{v}. The will goes on to describe the image on the cloth, but unfortunately, I have found this to be unintelligible.

81. Burgess, *Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints'*, p. 15; Weaver, *Somerset Medieval Wills 1383-1500*, p. 284. It may also be noted that from

the 1490s the Bristol testamentary evidence reveals 'Anne' to have became popular as a name for the daughters of the urban élite.

82. Ellen Muller, 'Saintly Virgins', pp. 95-6.

83. Neale, *William Worcestre*, pp. 58-9.

84. *Ibid.*, pp. 56-9.

85. W. J. Pountney, *Old Bristol Potteries*, repr. (Bristol, London and New York: Waterfield, 1972), p. 288.

86. Great Orphan Book, f. 42v.

87. Patrick McGrath (ed.), *A Bristol Miscellany*, BRS 37 (1985), p. 5.

88. Nicholas Harris Nicolas (ed.), *Privy Purse Expenses of Elizabeth of York: Wardrobe Accounts of Edward the Fourth* (London: Pickering, 1830), pp. 42-3.

89. Great Orphan Book, f. 258v.

90. For information on the chapel and its guild see p. 208 above.

91 . Great Orphan Book, f. 258v.

92 . Pamela Sheingorn, 'Appropriating the Holy Kinship: Gender and Family History', in Ashley and Sheingorn, *Interpreting Cultural Symbols*, pp. 169-98 (p. 173).

93. Burgess, *Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints*, p. 15; see also pp. 229-30 above for the bequests of Alice Warminster to the altars of Our Lady and St. Anne.

94. BRO, Fox Collection, 08153 (1) and (4), no. 69.

95. Duffy, 'Holy Maydens, Holy Wyfes: the Cult of Women Saints in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century England', in Sheils and Wood, *Women in the Church*, pp. 175-96 (p. 192).

96. See Brewer and Gairdner, *Letters and Papers*, 3 (i), 497.

97. A. Richardson, 'St. Anne's Chapel, Brislington', *PSANHS*, 44 (1898), pp. 188-97 (p. 196).

98. Phil Quinn, *The Holy Wells of Bath and Bristol Region* (Little Logaston: Logaston, 1999), p. 149.

CHAPTER 7

'A LADY MOST DEVOUT AND CHARITABLE': THE PIETY OF DAME MAUD BAKER c. 1460-1504

The above description, referring to Maud Baker *alias* Spicer of Bristol, is taken from the All Saints' church book, which volume also describes her as a 'reverent and gracious lady' and an 'honourable lady', and goes on to list her numerous benefactions to that church.[1] Yet, although in some ways, as a generous and devout parish benefactress, Maud can be said to have typified the rich, pious, fifteenth-century, urban widow, so that a discussion of her piety helps to clarify or illustrate more fully some of the points made in preceding chapters about the devotional lives and activities of laywomen in this particular urban setting, there are other indications that she possessed a piety of unusual depth and complexity. Thus, we can also compare and contrast her particular pious practices and experiences with those of other women, thereby enabling us to formulate ideas, or to draw some conclusions about the general nature of laywomen's piety in late medieval Bristol. For these reasons, she makes a compelling subject for study, and although some aspects of her devotional activities have been discussed in previous chapters in order to exemplify various points raised about female piety in the late medieval urban community, I have thought it appropriate to devote to her a separate chapter. Furthermore, as well as her lengthy will, which is a considerably detailed document, concerned not only with pious arrangements for her soul on her decease, but also with the consolidation of plans made for her vast array of kin and associates, there exists a comparatively large and diverse amount of source material relating to her and her family, more than for any other woman living in Bristol in this period.

Wife, Mother and Widow

The date of Maud's birth is unknown, but in light of other evidence, such as the date of her first husband's will and the recorded birth dates of the Baker

children, a date somewhere around 1460 seems most likely. She was born into the Woddington family, of whose precise origin little is known, although the 1436 will of Edward Rede, a Bristol parchmentmaker, mentions a debt owing to William Wodyngton 'de Kerdyf in Wallia', so the family may have originated from south Wales.[2] They rose to some prominence in Bristol after 1440, the most distinguished of them being William Woddington (probably the son of the above William), a wealthy merchant who served as town sheriff in 1471 and mayor in 1480. He also served as procurator of St. John's church and was one of the founders of the guild of the Holy Rood in that church in 1465.[3] It seems likely that this man was Maud's father, particularly as he was named as an executor in the will of her first husband.[4] In the church book of All Saints', her mother, also Maud, is mentioned, but of this woman's family background, I have been unable to uncover any information.[5] In her will, Maud specified prayers to be said 'for the sowlys of my late ij husbondys', although she only mentioned the second by name. However, her first marriage appears to have been to John Hutton of St. Werburgh's parish, who died in 1485, and who belonged to a wealthy family of Bristol merchants. In his will, he left goods and property to 'Matilde, vxori mee', making her one of his executors, along with other members of the Woddington family. People later mentioned in Maud's will, such as his apprentice Humfrey Bradley, were also left bequests, as were his three sons, John, William and Richard.[6] The first-named of these children, probably the eldest, was frequently mentioned in Maud's will as 'John Hutton, my sonne', and to him she left money and property, as well as various instructions and responsibilities for carrying out her wishes after her death. It may also be noted that Thomas Baker, Maud's second husband, in his will of 1492, left to John and William, sons of 'Johannis Hutton, nuper mercatoris dicte ville Bristoll', 100s each, which they were to receive at the age of twenty-four, and which further suggests that they were his wife's children by a former marriage.[7]

Maud's motives for remarrying are open to some conjecture, perhaps, for she must have married Thomas Baker *alias* Spicer fairly rapidly after Hutton's death in order for her to have given birth to her daughter Joan late in 1486.[8] However, as a widow in her mid-twenties, left with young children, it was not entirely unlikely that she would choose to marry again. Furthermore, the practice of rapid remarriage was not unknown amongst the urban élite classes of medieval England. Discussions for the second marriage of Margaret Stodeye, Lady Philipot, daughter of a prosperous fourteenth-century London vintner, for example, were already taking place while she was pregnant with her third child by her deceased first husband. Her fourth marriage also appears to have taken place less than a year after the death of her third. Caroline Barron, writing of London widows, has pointed out that the 'extremely wealthy' could be pressurized into remarriage, and although the Bakers and Woddingtons cannot be considered as being in the same league financially as the families Margaret Stodeye married into, they were amongst the wealthiest and most powerful families of Bristol in the mid-to-late fifteenth century, and it remains a possibility that family influence was brought to bear upon Maud in this respect.[9] It is of interest to note that remarriage was a possibility seemingly rejected by her step-daughter Alice some years later, when she too was widowed at a young age.

The names of various Bakers and Spicers in Bristol are to be found in a number of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century wills, deeds and corporation records, but there is no certainty as to which branch Thomas was descended from.[10] It is also unclear why he was known by both names, although this was not an uncommon practice among wealthy Bristolians, or indeed, medieval urban élites in general.[11] Thomas was a merchant and grocer by profession, and, as his 1492 will reveals, a man of considerable wealth. In the same document, he also mentions James Baker, deceased, most likely his brother, whom he refers to as a merchant, further indicating that the family was well-

established among the mercantile community in this period. Both men were also mentioned several times in the late fifteenth-century overseas trade accounts of Bristol as exporters of woad and other goods.[12] The family apparently had some links with St. Briavels in the Forest of Dean, for Thomas left 40s to its parish church, on condition that his obit be kept there in the week after his decease.[13] He held the position of bailiff in 1482/3 and was sheriff of Bristol in 1489/90. He also served as churchwarden of All Saints' and was a proctor of the Jesus guild there, along with other members of the town's governing élite, such as the Chesters, Parnaunts and Snygges.[14]

Whether or not Maud had actively sought the marriage of her own free will, the relationship between her and her second husband appears to have been one of considerable trust and affection. He appointed her as an executor in his will, leaving her all his lands, tenements and rents in the town and suburbs of Bristol 'durante vita sua' [during her life], whilst also entrusting to her the care of Magdalene Baker, daughter of the abovementioned James, stating that she was to receive £20 at the age of sixteen, on condition that she would be 'gubernata' [governed] and 'maritata' [married] according to the 'aduisamentum et consilium' [advice and council] of Maud. He also left to his other brother William 100s, providing that he was 'beniuolus' to his wife Maud in all his transactions.[15] Maud herself, in her will, asked to be buried in All Saints' church 'under the same stone wher Thomas Baker, late my husband, was buried'.[16] It would appear, however, that Maud had not been Thomas Baker's first wife. As she was not widowed for the first time until 1485, his two eldest daughters, Alice, born most likely in 1476/7 and Margaret, born definitely in 1479, and to whom he left equal amounts of money and goods in his will along with his other children, must have been his offspring from a previous marriage, and therefore Maud's step-daughters.[17] Maud gave no indication of this in her will, referring to Alice, as 'my dowgther', and leaving her a long list of items, but the word 'daughter', could also stand for step-

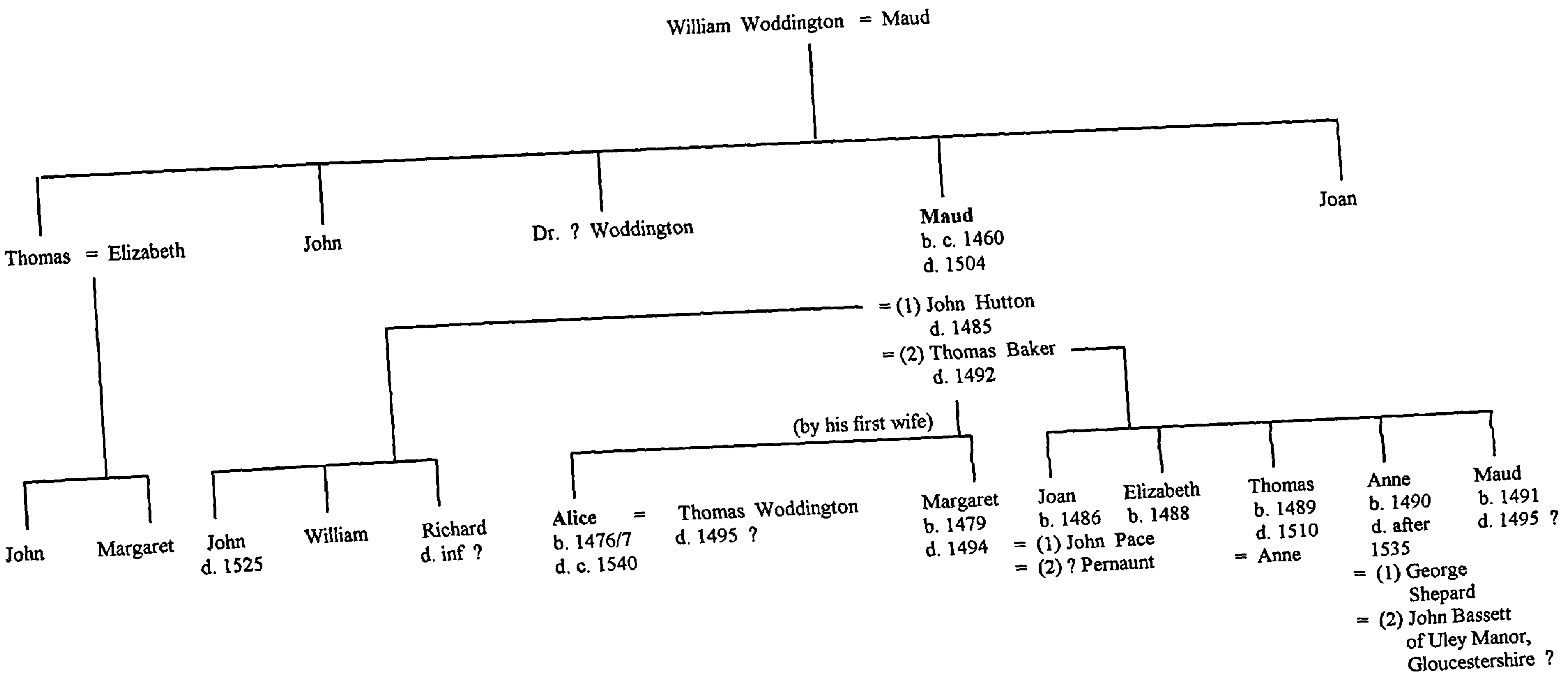


Fig. 13

daughter or daughter-in-law in medieval wills, and the fact that Maud referred to Alice as such and not as a step-daughter, or merely as her husband's child, may indicate a particular closeness between the two women. Furthermore, that Alice and Margaret were step-daughters explains the large gap between their birth dates and those of the other Baker children. After Margaret's birth in 1479, no other Baker children were born until Joan, late in 1486, followed by four others in very quick succession, Elizabeth in 1488, Thomas in 1489, Anne in 1490 and her mother's namesake Maud or Matilda in 1491.[18] Margaret, Alice's sister of the whole blood, died in November 1494 at the age of fifteen, while Maud, the youngest, was not mentioned in her mother's will, so presumably she had died some time between 1494 (the date when her birth was recorded in the Register of Recognizances) and 1503, when Maud made her will.[19] If she had still been living, it seems likely that her mother would have made the same careful provision for her future as she had for her daughter Anne, seeing that the two girls were less than a year or eighteen months apart in age. Regarding the others, Alice died some time after 1539, while Thomas died in 1510 at the age of twenty-one. Anne was still alive in 1510 as she was a beneficiary of her brother's very brief will (the only one of his sisters to be mentioned in that document), and may have married as her second husband, Robert Bassett of Uley manor, Gloucestershire, in 1515.[20] Joan Baker married Thomas Pace, and, as discussed below, may later have become a vowess, but details of the life of her sister Elizabeth remain elusive.

The Vowess

For the twelve years of her second widowhood, Maud retained some involvement in her husband's grocery business, continuing to train her husband's apprentices, or to take on new ones herself. To Thomas Yonge, 'my apprentice', she left £4 in money 'discomptid the money conteyned in his

indentur, whos terme and yeris yet due, I geve and bequeth vnto Thomas, my sonne and to Thomas Pace, my sonne in the lawe'. A similar arrangement was made regarding her other apprentice, Thomas Bale. It may be noted that a Thomas Bale was mentioned as an apprentice in the will of her second husband, eleven years earlier: this may have been the same man mentioned in Maud's will, although given the length of time that had passed, he was perhaps more likely to have been a relative of the original man. Even so, it indicates that there was a degree of continuity within the family business and social circle. Thomas Yonge was not mentioned in Thomas Baker's will, and was doubtless taken on by Maud after her husband's death.[21] Her desire to ensure the continuity and smooth running of the family business may also be noted in the instructions left to her son-in-law, Thomas Pace, married to her daughter Joan, and himself from a grocer family. He was to 'have the rule, ordre and gouernange of the aforenamed Thomas Baker, my son, for to lerne, enforme and tech the same Thomas Bakar in the ocupacion of grocers until his age of xvj yeris'.[22] It is also significant that one of her gifts to All Saints' church, included '2 copes...with shells of silver enamelled with the arms of Grocers, that cost unto her-£27' which hints at the overlap of the secular and religious aspects of her world.[23] Even so, there are a number of indications that her piety went beyond that of the rich and conventionally pious Bristol widow.

Sometime after Thomas's death, although it has not been possible to establish when exactly, Maud took a vow of chastity, becoming 'lady by profession to the mantle and the ring', which involved making a vow before the bishop of the diocese in which she dwelt.[24] Medieval women, usually widows, chose to follow such a path for a variety of reasons. Sometimes, a husband's will stipulated that his wife was only to keep and retain control of property if she kept herself single and chaste; this was not necessarily selfishness on the part of the deceased, but often done to protect the property interests of children from the marriage to prevent it from falling into the

hands of any future husband a wife might take. This may have lain behind the vows of some women, but it is likely that such a decision was also induced by strong pious motives, for a wife could merely remain unmarried if she feared loss of property. Following such a path allowed a woman to live a chaste and pious life, but did not require her to withdraw from the world or to give up her wealth and property, for unlike a woman entering a religious order, she did not make vows of poverty and obedience. It can therefore be argued that it was a life particularly suited to a devout-minded and pious urban widow who still had the affairs of a young family and a trade or business to see to. Yet, it may be noted that this course of action does not seem to have been undertaken by any other of Maud's female contemporaries in Bristol, even those women, such as Alice Chester, widowed for a long time and noted for their piety. Certainly, the request that wives keep themselves single and chaste in order for them to keep control of property was fairly frequent in the wills of Bristol male testators, and it appears that the wives of these men did not remarry, but they did not become vowesses.[25] This contrasts with other large urban centres such as London, Norwich and York where it is evident that women more frequently chose to become vowesses in the late medieval period.[26] More locally, both wills and bishops' registers indicate or give details of a number of women from the counties of Somerset and Gloucestershire who became vowesses, although such women do appear to have been more numerous in the southern diocese of Bath and Wells than that of Worcester, particularly in the second half of the fifteenth century. Of course, the evidence may simply have not survived, but having searched the most likely sources, that is, wills and the registers of both the bishops of Worcester and Bath and Wells for the fifteenth century, I have found only one other instance of a Bristol woman taking such vows, this being a Joan Pernaunte, whose much later will of 1532, in which she refers to herself as 'widoo professed' is preserved among the collection of Fox documents. There

is, I believe, a definite possibility that this was Maud's daughter Joan, who had originally married Thomas Pace, and later, perhaps, married again. Apart from the fact that she was also of All Saints' parish, leaving to its church numerous precious and pious objects, her sole executor was a 'Thomas Pacy of Bristowe, grocer' (perhaps her son from her first marriage, or a nephew). Further, in the main body of the will, there is a reference to 'my godsyster Jane Pacy'.[27] If Joan Pernaunte was Maud's daughter, it seems evident either that the older woman had transmitted to the younger some of her pious inclinations for the religious life, or that Joan had inherited from her mother a disposition towards a certain type of piety.

A number of factors, doubtless, had a bearing on Maud's decision to follow this path. The will of her last husband had stated that if all or any of his children died under age, she was to enjoy their portions during her life, 'si se solam et unmaritatam durante vita sua custodierit' [if she keeps herself single and unmarried during her life].[28] Although this may have been one of the reasons that lay behind her decision, it should also be remembered that she had been married twice, had given birth to eight children as well as bringing up step-children, and probably had no desire or saw no reason to marry again. Furthermore, from what is known of her life, there seems no doubt that she was motivated by genuine piety, and it may well have been the case that at this stage in her life, her second widowhood, she felt more able or inclined to cultivate the contemplative and spiritual sides of her nature, as was not uncommonly the case amongst women of socially élite groups. It is a distinct possibility that she was influenced in her decision by her association with a Bristol anchoress for, in her will, she bequeathed 'to the lady ancres at the Blake Freers of Brystow aforesayd, xxs to be payd wekely, iid or more yf need be, vntill the sayd xxs be forme abovesayde payde.'[29] Bristol, throughout the medieval period, in comparison with other cities of a similar size such as Norwich and York, possessed few anchorites and anchoresses.

Norman Tanner has suggested that the preponderance of recluses in Norwich may have been due to continental influences and East Anglia's close proximity to the Low Countries where many of the new devotional trends centred on the mystical and contemplative life originally developed and flourished in the fifteenth century.[30] Clearly, Bristol, lying in the south-west of the country, was much less susceptible to those religious movements and ideas that spread from the Low Countries to Norfolk and the surrounding counties before progressing further upwards to the north and east of England. It may also have been the case that those socio-economic factors which I have previously argued limited the ability of sons and daughters of the Bristol élite to enter upon a monastic vocation may have been at work here, affecting the ability of individuals to pursue the life of the solitary and the amount of patronage available for those in the city who did. Jonathan Hughes has observed that 'close involvement or interest in such a life suggests an important departure from the conventions of family and social religion', something of which those who belonged to the insular and tight-knit élite community of Bristol may have been particularly aware.[31]

Whatever the case, Maud's bequest to the anchoress at the Blackfriars is the only Bristol testamentary reference that I have found relating to this woman, although she was mentioned by one Bath testator in 1512, Sir Richard Estyngton, who left to her the much smaller bequest of 3s 4d.[32] Thus, apart from the fact that an anchoress resided at the Blackfriars between the years 1503-1512 (although presumably Maud had known her before this date), how long one had been there and when one no longer existed is uncertain.[33] In light of what is known about Maud's piety, her relationships with other women, religious and lay, and the fact that she was concerned for the maintenance of the 'lady ancres', it seems possible that she knew the anchoress well, perhaps being a regular visitor to the cell at the Dominican friary, and one may even speculate on whether their conversations resembled anything like

those which took place between Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, the latter writing of 'þe holy dalyawns þat þe ankres & þis creatur haddyn be comawnyng in þe lofe of owr Lord Ihesu Crist many days þat þei were togedyr'.[34] If so, the association may have been an unusual one, for no other woman from among the Bristol élite mentioned a solitary female religious.[35]

Maud's links and relationships with a number of other pious laywomen and their possible formative influence on her piety have already been discussed in part elsewhere, through her role as a benefactress to All Saints' church, and I do not propose to go over the same ground here. However, continuing this theme of female networks and pious associations between women, I intend to look at Maud's relationships with women outside of this group of widows, including women religious. Thus, the following section looks at her interaction with other members of her family, friends and kin, but focuses particularly on her relationship with her step-daughter, Alice Baker. Although it is not possible to probe into great depth regarding the nature of the two women's spirituality, discussion of the issue does throw some light, firstly, on the mother-daughter relationship, thereby linking up with points made previously about patterns of piety and the transmission of pious characteristics between women of the same family, and secondly, on the relationship between laywomen and nuns, something of which we have otherwise little evidence as regards late-medieval Bristol.

Family and Friends: Patterns of Pious Association and Transmission

Much of Maud's will is taken up with bequests to her brothers and sisters, and their children, and is demonstrative of the tendency for female testators, particularly widows, to favour their own blood kin in preference to those of their husbands, although few Bristol women mentioned as many people or listed their bequests as systematically as Maud Baker. She remitted all debts owing to her by her two brothers, Thomas and John Woddington, leaving to

the latter for his services as an executor of her will, 'a cup with a cover of siluer in parcels gilte standing apon iij angelles grauen in siluer'. To Thomas's two children, John and Margaret, she left £6 each, and to John's wife, Elizabeth, 'a girdel with a gren corse and a payr of beedys of mother of perle'. To 'Master Doctor Wodington, my brother', who may have been a cleric, she left 'a peyr of beedys of avmber with gawdyes gilte' and again, remitted all his debts to her.[36] To her sister Joan, wife of John Jones, she left £5 in money, and 'a gown furred with grey and a kyrtell', while possible remembrance of her husband's family included bequests to 'Mawdelyn, wife of William Havington' (perhaps the Magdalen Baker mentioned in the will of her husband Thomas) of 'a girdell of blak velvet with ad(um?)sent of siluer ouergilte', and to Joan, their daughter, £20.[37] She also left to a John Baker 20s in money, although she did not state her relationship to him.

She remembered all her surviving children, leaving to Joan, 'my best girdell with rynges, beedys, plate and money, with other stuf of howseholde' to the value of 20 marks. To Elizabeth, she left £20 'in money, plate and stuff of howseholde', and to Thomas, as well as property, £20 'in aparell of his howse and implementes apperteynyng to the same'. Anne also received 20 marks 'in money, plate and howsholde', and she and her young husband had property settled on them.[38] However, it was, I feel, her relationship with Alice Baker, her step-daughter 'withyn the Abbey of Shaftysbury', that is of the most interest. The exact date Alice entered the nunnery is unknown, but from Maud's will written in 1503, it is evident that she was still a novice, and a 1504 entry in the register of Edmund Audley, Bishop of Salisbury (1502-1524), lists 'Alicia Baker', as one of 22 nuns 'tacite professe' [awaiting profession] at the election of Elizabeth Shelford.[39] Maud left an extensive list of items that Alice was to take into the nunnery with her, including 'a litell standyng cup of siluer with a cover overgilte and nutte with a couer of siluer ouergilte, vj sponys of siluer, a fetherbed with and all other aparell as well to

the same beed as to hir chamber perteynyng or belongyng, according to hir religion'. She also bequeathed to her 10 marks in money, objects of religious significance such as 'a peyr of blak bedys with v wondes of golde, a payr of bedys of golde with ii blewe stonys in every set', and household items of a more practical nature such as 'ii tabulcothes of diaper, ii towellys of diaper', and 'vj napkins of diaper' which apparently 'bequestyd the sayd Alis'. These were to be delivered to her 'at the day of hir profession' along with 'x mark for to pay for hir dinner at the day of hir profession, wich x marks I wille shal be deliuered att vnto the sayd Lady Abbas of the abbey abovesayd.'[40] Although nuns were not expected to own personal property, in other areas where nunneries have been studied, such as East Anglia, it has been noted that those girls and women entering a nunnery were expected to bring with them certain household goods, and Eileen Power, in her general study of English nunneries, has pointed out that women could take such things for support, in lieu of a dowry.[41] Yet, it is of interest to note that the two women had evidently discussed the bequest of these items before Maud's death, hinting at the likelihood that the whole issue of Alice's choice of vocation had been much discussed between them.

There are, however, a number of things about Alice's situation that appear unusual, when compared with the experiences of other young Bristol women, and indeed, her own sisters. Alice, when still a novice in 1504, was about twenty-six or twenty-seven years of age, and would therefore probably have been in her early-to mid-twenties when she entered the nunnery. One wonders why, if she had intended to follow a religious vocation, she had not done so earlier. Maud, in her will, did not state or indicate that Alice had been married, but there is evidence to suggest that this was the case. A memorandum written after Thomas Baker's will in the Great Orphan Book, and dated six months after his death, records that Thomas Woddington, 'disponsauit Aliciam, filiam eiusdem Thome' [espoused Alice, daughter of the

same Thomas], and that he took possession of the goods left to her in her father's will.[42] Also, there is the abovementioned entry in the Register of Recognizances recording the death of Margaret, Alice's sister, which afterwards states that Margaret's share of her father's goods, as stipulated in his will, went to his wife Maud: the entry then goes on to say that she had given a sixth share of this to 'Thome Wodynton et Alicie, vxori eius', clearly the same Thomas and Alice mentioned in the above memorandum.[43] No other information is given about this Thomas Woddington, although there is little doubt that he was related to Maud (perhaps a nephew), which would show a desire to further cement the union between the Baker and Woddington families.[44] It should also be pointed out that two of Alice's surviving half-sisters were married at a young age. Joan Baker, seventeen at the time Maud made her will, was already married, as was her youngest daughter Anne, who was only thirteen, although Maud's will suggests that she and her husband were not actually living as man and wife. They probably resided in the same household, however, for it appears that Anne's husband had been placed under Maud's care and control. In her will, she specified that the 'custody and wardeship of George Shepard, sonne and eyre in apparence of Iohn Shepard, late of Bristow and of Anne, his wife, my daughter' was to go to her son, John Hutton. Indeed, a substantial portion of the will is taken up with the details relating to this marriage of Anne to George, and arrangements had been made that if he died, 'before the sayd age of xxj yerys and before carnall copulacion had betwene the seyd George and Anne, that then, Iohn Shepard the yonger, the second sone of the sayd Iohn Shepard, Esquier, shal, by Goddys grace, marry and take to wife, after the forme and law of holy church, the said Anne...as in a payre of endenturs therof made more playnly apperith.'[45] This seems very much like a typical dynastic alliance made between two wealthy urban families, the Shepards and the Bakers, similar to the one formed between the Paces and the Bakers, and one which Maud may have played a part

in bringing about. It seems unlikely that Anne had much say in the matter, although she evidently set up home with her Shepard husband for she was still married to him in 1510, as her brother's will testifies. I do not know why similar arrangements had not apparently been made for Elizabeth, Maud's second daughter, who, although only two years older than Anne, merited only a brief mention in her mother's will, but in view of the fact that two of the Baker girls were married young, it would be surprising if Alice had never been married by the age of twenty-six. Whatever the case, it seems evident that Thomas Woddington had died sometime before 1500, and that the marriage had been a short one. However, it is notable that the various references to her as a female religious give no indication that she had ever been a married woman. As well as the reference in Bishop Audley's register, some thirty-five years later, in 1539, when Elizabeth Zouch, the last Abbess of Shaftesbury, finally surrendered the abbey's seal to Henry VIII's commissioners, Alice is listed in the Book of Augmentations as one of the nuns who was to receive a pension, in her case, of £6 6s 8d p. a.[46] In both these instances, she is referred to as Alice Baker, not Alice Woddington. One wonders, therefore, if her reversion to use of her original surname signalled an apathy to or dislike of married life and represented an attempt to erase all trace of her marital identity.[47] As girls from wealthy families entering nunneries appear to have been a rarity in Bristol, this alone makes Alice stand out.[48] It is possible that she had been a particularly pious child or expressed a preference for a religious vocation from a young age, but had been married in her mid-teens (as were most girls from the Bristol élite) to cement a union or alliance between two eminent Bristol families. Had the desire for the religious life held strong throughout, or resurfaced after, her marriage, as shown by her decision not to take another husband, although only in her twenties? Perhaps her marriage had not been happy.

If Alice's decision to become a nun was uncommon for a Bristol woman, so

was her choice of religious house. As discussed previously, the female religious houses mentioned in the wills of Bristol testators, with one or two exceptions, were the local nunneries of St. Mary Magdalen in Bristol and Mynchin Barrow, eight miles to the south-west of the city. None mentioned Shaftesbury in Dorset, although being forty-five miles away, it was not entirely out of the locality. Yet the selection of nunnery may well reflect a certain ambition and determination on Alice's part, for Shaftesbury, a royal Saxon foundation, was one of the most prestigious houses for women in the country. Despite occasional periods of financial difficulty in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it boasted tremendous wealth, its landed possessions being vast.[49] Its influence on the surrounding region was considerable, and, throughout the centuries of its existence, it counted among its inhabitants, women of aristocratic, and occasionally, royal blood. It also included, particularly in later periods, many women from the gentry families of Dorset and Wiltshire, such as the Fovants, Bonhams and Stourtons, a number of whom served as abbesses of the institution.[50] The lists of nuns, both at the election of Elizabeth Shelford in 1504 and in the 1539 pension list, show that during the late medieval period, a great many of the nuns there came from prominent local families such as the Ashleys, Champneys, Horseys, Twynyhos, and Zouches; thus Alice's inclusion amongst them as a Bristol merchant's daughter is unusual. It is possible that Alice's own mother had had Wiltshire or Dorset connections, or that the Shaftesbury connection had something to do with Maud's links or friendships with one or more of the nuns there. In her will, she left 'to the Lady Abbas of the abbey of Shafftisbury, a peyre of beedys of corall of vj sette with gawdys of siluer overgilte', although whether this was a conventional gift to the head of a house on the acceptance of a daughter into its fold, or whether it betokened something of a more personal nature, is unclear.[51] The Abbess, at the time of Maud's death, was Margery Twynyho (d. 1504), a woman of a distinguished Dorset family, whose brother,

Sir Christopher, served in the capacity of steward to the abbey, and was buried there. However, I have been unable to find any specific links between the Bakers of Bristol and the Twynyhos of Dorset in the lifetimes of either Maud or Alice.[52]

Although it may not be possible to uncover the exact circumstances which lay behind Alice's choice of vocation, it can be reasonably surmised that her pious and devotional leanings had been influenced by those of her step-mother. As far as laywomen's piety in late-medieval Bristol is concerned, it appears that both the religious paths chosen by the two women, namely those of nun and vowess, were unusual, and must, therefore, surely reflect something of the nature of the relationship between them, all the more so since it would appear that both women made their pious resolutions at about the same time. Depending on how long Alice was married (although it seems that it may not have been very long, particularly as there is no evidence of the union having produced any children), her decision to become a nun was probably taken around the mid-to-late 1490s, while it seems likely that Maud took her vow before the bishop of the diocese a year or two after the death of her husband in 1492. While no other example can be found for Bristol, the pattern of vowesses having daughters who became nuns (a pattern which suggests that a particular type of pious disposition was passed on from mother to daughter) can be traced in the lives of urban women elsewhere. Mary Erler, for example, has written of Alice Brice, a contemporary London widow, who took a vow of chastity sometime between the dates of 1467-1499, while her daughter from her first marriage, Alice Crichefield, became a nun at Halliwell nunnery, although this occurred a few years before her mother was widowed for the third and final time in 1467.[53] Yet, while not denying that Maud was a deeply devout woman who may have helped to formulate the nature of Alice's piety, it seems possible in this case that pious impulses may have been transmitted not only from mother to daughter, from older woman to younger

woman, but vice-versa, and that the decision taken by Maud to become a vowess may have been influenced by her step-daughter's piety and her resolve to enter upon a life devoted to religion. In part, this may have been due to the fact that Alice was a strong-minded, as well as a highly religiously-motivated young woman, as evidenced by her apparent decision to revert to her maiden name of Baker following her husband's death. Her desire to follow such a vocation may have reawakened similar pious impulses in Maud, and it is worth reiterating the point that Maud and Alice were step-mother and daughter rather than sharing a blood tie. Alice would have been nine or ten when her father married Maud, and the older woman may have ultimately viewed the girl in a somewhat different light to her own daughters, although this should not be taken to mean that she viewed her less favourably or took less interest in her affairs or well-being, for the relationship between them was seemingly a close and amiable one. It is true that Alice Baker was married at about the age of sixteen to one of Maud's relatives, in which process Maud probably played a part, but rather than attempting to encourage a second marriage, as she herself had entered into, she appears to have accepted, approved, and possibly even been influenced by Alice's choice of vocation. As they were related by marriage rather than by blood, it may have been possible for Maud to support or entertain more easily Alice's pious inclinations, rather than being influenced or compromised by dynastic concerns, and the need or desire to safeguard or further the interests of her own blood kin through marriage and the acquisition of money or property.

Of Alice's life in the nunnery at Shaftesbury and after its suppression, little is known for certain, except that she was still alive in 1539 (as is shown by the record in the Book of Augmentations), and dead by 1553, as her name no longer appears in the list.[54] Looking at the pension list of ex-nuns, it can be seen that Alice's pension lay mid-way down the scale of payments. Given that she had been a nun in the house for forty years and would have been sixty-

two or three years old at the time of the Dissolution, we might have expected to find her in the upper range of pensions, particularly as, in a couple of cases at least, the nuns to be found in the higher range had been novices at the same time as she had. These women, it may be noted, tended to come from well-connected gentry families, and this may reflect the fact that women like Alice, coming from an urban background, even a wealthy one, were less likely than those of gentry origin to attain the highest office or status, at least within the country's more prestigious nunneries. Regarding the issue of status and office-holding in medieval nunneries, it has been argued by Marilyn Oliva that 'election to high monastic office was due less to a nun's social status than to her ability to carry out the duties of various monastic offices', but as she admits, her study of East Anglian nunneries is based, for the most part, on nunneries of modest wealth. These institutions attracted most of their members from the lower parish gentry, who consequently made up the majority of office-holders in them. Furthermore, she acknowledges that the case was somewhat different with the wealthiest house in the diocese, Campsey Ash Priory, which had a majority of upper gentry officers amongst its ranks.[55] Thus, Shaftesbury, as one of the country's richest and most influential nunneries may have favoured its high-born gentry members over and above the few nuns of urban birth. It also seems possible that Alice, belonging to an urban rather than a gentry family, may have remained something of an outsider within the nunnery. A number of the local gentry families who supported or maintained close links with the abbey between 1500 and the Dissolution frequently mentioned many of the sisters individually by name in their wills, but Alice's name never occurs. The will of Sir George Twynho (d. 1525), nephew of the abovementioned Sir Christopher and Abbess Margery, for example, named ten individual nuns, all from wealthy Dorset, Somerset and Wiltshire families, who were left money bequests and gifts of a more personal nature. Significantly, it can be noted that a number of them

had been novices with Alice, so that she is almost conspicuous by her absence. It would appear from this that local family and friendship groupings were maintained within the abbey, and it is to be wondered therefore, if a woman like Alice, coming from a mercantile community, felt excluded from them.[56]

It remains difficult to trace the whereabouts and activities of ex-nuns after the Dissolution and whether they married, returned to their families or set up home together, but there is some evidence to suggest that the Shaftesbury nuns kept in touch with one another, and that some continued to live together in small groups. In 1553, forty-eight surviving nuns, the prioress and sub-prioress were given a small pension by the ex-Abbess, Elizabeth Zouch, showing that she had kept in contact with the women who had been under her supervision.[57] Also, a 1574 surviving terrier of the site which was 'lately the Monastery of Shaftesbury, now in ruins', mentions two tenements which had previously been rented by Margaret Mayo and Edith Maudlen.[58] These two women had once been nuns at the abbey, as their names were included in the 1539 list, so it is evident that some nuns rented tenements and set up home together, in or near the grounds of the dissolved nunnery. Alice may have done the same, for it seems unlikely that she would have returned to Bristol, the city she had left nearly forty years before, particularly as there appear to have been few if any members of her family still living. However, the fact that, unlike most of her contemporaries at Shaftesbury, she was not of a gentry background and was not mentioned in the wills of those wealthy lay men and women who were in some way connected to or concerned with the affairs of the abbey, leaves this open to question, and makes the whole issue of what happened at the Dissolution to women like her from large urban communities, who had entered such high-status nunneries where most of the members were from noble or gentry families, all the more intriguing.

Other Friends and Associates

The women discussed above, both religious and lay, who were related or piously associated with Maud, were, like her, from wealthy backgrounds. (The anchoress at the Blackfriars may have come from this class, but there is not enough information given to determine her social origin.) However, there are others listed as legatees by Maud, about whom she gives little information, and who are consequently harder to place in the social spectrum, but who also need to be mentioned, as their relationship to her can be seen to be related to other aspects of her piety. Some of these bequests may have been token gestures to particular friends of hers, testifying further to an extensive kin and friendship network, but it seems more likely that a number of them came from a less wealthy or distinguished background than her own. A question mark hangs over the nature of her association with John Dee, who received 10s in money and his wife, Katherine, who was left 'a girdell of blak veluet with ad(um?)sent of siluer ouergilt'. A Dee *alias* Davy family were amongst the élite of late-fifteenth-century Bristol, and were, from the evidence of surviving wills, seemingly friends of the Bakers. However, John was described as a 'taylor' in Maud's will, a craft of comparatively low status, which may indicate that the couple were not of that family but a poorer one, unless he was a merchant taylor, being a member of the wealthy guild of the same name.[59] Possibly, Thomas Portar (who was left 20s in money) and his wife Margery, who was bequeathed the small sum of 3s 4d plus 'a gowne and a kirtell' by Maud, were also of relatively humble status, as the civic records of the period, where we might expect to find them if they had belonged to the élite, do not mention anyone of this name. Nor are there any medieval Bristol wills extant for a Portar family.

Other women numbered amongst the recipients of her will, who were not from among her social circle although they were members of her household, were her servants, Elizabeth Colston, Alis Hay and Elyn Russell, who each

received a small sum of money, a gown and a kirtell. It may be noted, however, that there are also a number of individual women mentioned by name to whom she left small bequests, who appear not to have been servants or to have belonged to the wealthier strata of society, but who should be briefly mentioned as they can, perhaps, illuminate points made previously about charitable giving to poor women in the late-fifteenth-century urban community.[60] In her will, Maud bequeathed 'to the por peopull moste nede at the day of my beryng iij pownde in money and at the day of my monythe mynde then next ensuyng, £3 in money'.[61] Poor women or particular groups of poor people were not singled out, but this may reflect the increasingly common trend among late-fifteenth-century Bristol testators, particularly women, of showing concern for poorer female members of society by leaving goods or money bequests to individuals personally known to them, who came from a poorer, although not necessarily a pauper background, rather than, as was the case in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, leaving sums of money to specific groups of poor women, such as poor virgins or widows, or female inhabitants residing in one or more of the city's hospitals and almshouses, who were not women usually individually known to them.[62] It may well be that some of Maud's bequests to women who were not, evidently, family members or servants, or, as far as I can tell, members of other wealthy urban families, fall into this category: these included women such as Alice Burton, to whom she left 'a girdell with a redd corse', Agnes Hall, who was left 3s 4d and 'a gown', Joan, wife of John Dier, who was left an identical bequest and Margery, daughter of John Spencer, who received the sum of 40s, which John owed to Maud and which he was to pay 'vnto the aforenamed Margery at the day of hir marriage'. Of course, the fact that these women may have been charitable recipients of her will does not necessarily preclude the possibility of her having also known them as friends.

So far, this chapter has concentrated on Maud's links and associations with

women, as it is these female relationships which seem to have had the most significant impact on her forms of pious expression. Yet the role of male religious, that is, members of the secular clergy, but more especially the order of Carthusian monks, and their possible influence on her piety, should not be overlooked.

Male Religious: Chaplains, Friars and the Carthusian Connection

Despite the fact that members of the Woddington family appear to have entered the priesthood, suggesting that the family as a whole was more than usually pious, the sum of money left by Maud to Richard Bromfelde, her parish priest, for tithes unpaid, was entirely conventional. However, she also made reference to a number of chaplains, including Richard Spinnell, perhaps her personal household chaplain, to whom she left 'xls, discountyng iijs iiijd which he owyde vnto me', and there appears to have been considerable expectation that this man would take upon himself the duties of the 'honest chapleyne of good name and fame' who was to sing and pray for her soul and the souls of her two husbands and parents for twelve years in All Saints' church. To 'Sir Ion Diar, chaplen', she remitted 'all such dettys as he oweth vnto me' and asked that 'his plegys now remayn in my keping [nowe remayn] be deliuerd vnto him bi myn executors vnderwriten.'[63] Her son Thomas, in his will of 1510, left 6s 8d to 'domino Iohanni Ionys', whom he described as 'nuper capellano pro matre mee', although this man was not mentioned in Maud's will.[64] Nevertheless, the bequest indicates a degree of continuity amongst those piously connected to her family.

Regarding the regular clergy, her apparent leanings towards the Carthusian order again point to a possible inclination towards the religious life. The Carthusians received more bequests than other orders from the laity of Bristol throughout the late medieval period (probably because of the nearness of the two houses of Witham and Hinton), but they still only amounted to a tiny

percentage and had almost ceased by the beginning of the sixteenth century. The majority of testators preferred to leave bequests to one or more of the four friaries within the city rather than to the religious orders, particularly women. Maud too left 20s 'to the Prior and Conuent of euery order of freres within the sayd towne of Bristow so that they be at my monthis mynde', but she also left the same sum to both 'the Prior and Conuent of the charterhows of Henton' and the 'Prior and conuent of Wittam'.[65] Being an austere order whose houses were usually sited in isolated areas, the Carthusians avoided all contact with women. Paradoxically, however, they appear to have held a strong fascination for some high-born, pious-minded noblewomen such as Margaret Beaufort, who showed a considerable enthusiasm for the order, coming from a family whose links with it had been strong. In her lifetime, she encouraged the production of texts favoured by the order and, along with her third husband, was admitted to the confraternity of La Chartreuse in 1478. In her will, she left money to the houses at Mountgrace, Sheen and London.[66] The Carthusians were instrumental in the transmission of continental and English devotional and spiritual writing, and amongst the numerous devotional texts owned by Carthusian houses were a number of texts of a wholly or partly mystical nature, written or dictated by women, including the only known copy of Margery Kempe's book, owned by Mountgrace Priory in Yorkshire, the shorter version of the revelations of Julian of Norwich and English copies of Marguerite Porete's *Mirror of Simple Souls*, although it appears that the female authorship of this last text was unknown by the monks. The manuscripts held in the library at Witham included the revelations of the two German mystics, Elizabeth of Scönau and Mecktild of Hackeborn, the Italian Catherine of Siena and Brigit of Sweden.[67] In her will, Maud did not divulge much information about her links with the two houses, so that it is not known how strong they were or from whence they dated. Yet the evidence still suggests that, like a number of highly devout noble and gentry

women, she was in no small measure influenced by the life-style and spirituality of the order, not the least because such an association strikes chords with other previously-mentioned elements of her piety, such as her decision to become a vowess and her friendship with a solitary female religious. Taken together, they are suggestive of a piety that was, or increasingly leant towards, the meditative and contemplative, signalling a draw or attraction towards an ascetic, even eremitic way of life. Although tendencies such as these may, in part, have had some influence upon the pious mentalities of other urban élites such as those of Norwich and York, they were seemingly much less a feature of the piety of the wealthy Bristol laity. Neither of Maud's two husbands or the sons who survived her mentioned the Carthusians in their respective wills, thereby suggesting a degree of pious individualism on her part, rather than the influence of family and social circle. There is little evidence either that she had contacts with noble or gentry families who patronized the order. However, it is possible that there were links between her association with the Carthusians and her devotion to the cult of the Holy Name, and that these two aspects of her piety may have influenced or informed the other. As discussed in a previous chapter, devotion to the cult was something she shared with other wealthy widows, and may have partly sprung from a common female experience of religion, and an empathy with Christ's sufferings on the cross. A number of the texts favoured by or associated with the Carthusians emphasized or were concerned with meditation on Christ's Passion, including those by the hermit, Richard Rolle of Hampole, whose works (a number of which were owned by the Witham house), contained much evidence of his devotion to the Holy Name and his interest in the *Mirror of the Blessed Lyf of Jesus Christ*, an English translation by Nicholas Love, Prior of Mountgrace, of the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes Vitae Christi*. As far as women in particular are concerned, the figure of Margaret Beaufort can again be invoked as an example of a high-born, pious woman, who, as well

as patronizing the Carthusians, was a devout adherent of the cult of the Holy Name; these aspects of her piety may have been linked, or found expression through each other. Wynkyn de Worde's 1494 version of Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* can be cited in this instance, as this was made from a copy of the text whose circulation had been encouraged by members of the Sheen and London charterhouses in the last decade of the fifteenth century, and included a long passage on the Name of Jesus which may have been in Hilton's original, plus insertions of the Name in other parts of the text. The edition was dedicated to Margaret, and she was keen to encourage its circulation, presenting it jointly with her daughter-in-law, Elizabeth of York, to a lady of the court, Lady Mary Roos, a woman whose family also had Carthusian connections.[68] There is no concrete evidence that Maud was familiar with these Carthusian-associated texts, but it remains a distinct possibility.

What then overall can be said about Dame Maud Baker of Bristol in the context of time and place? In a number of ways, it can be seen that her life was typical of many women from the commercial élite classes of late-medieval Bristol. She married twice, bore eight children, as well as bringing up and overseeing the interests of step-children. In the mould of a capable and trusted wife, she remained actively involved with her husband's business after his death, ensuring that her son was brought up to continue that trade. Seemingly an organized and methodical woman, as is evidenced by her lengthy will, there can clearly be seen, in all her arrangements, a desire to involve all members of her family, those related by blood and by marriage, in each other's lives and welfare. We may note her decisions to entrust the care and education of her younger son Thomas into the hands of her son-in-law, Thomas Pace, and that of her very young daughter and son-in-law to her elder son, John Hutton, and possibly, her initial influence in the marriage of her step-daughter Alice to a member of the Woddington family. However, she was also a woman of particular devoutness, as shown by her munificent

benefactions to All Saints' church, which were set down in the church book. Wealthy and powerful Bristol widows, many of whom had familial or social links with Maud, appear to have made up the largest and most prolific group of gift-givers to All Saints' parish church in the last decades of the fifteenth century, and the fact that a number of their donations and bequests reveal similarities in pious tastes, hints at the likelihood of shared religious experiences, and through this, the creation of a female or 'feminized' space within the church building.[69]

Yet if her pious associations with All Saints' can be said to illustrate the close-knit networks that existed between laywomen of the social élite and their influence upon each other's pious and devotional lives, her relationship with her step-daughter and her support for Alice Baker's decision to follow a religious vocation, along with her own decision to become a vowess, and her bequests to the anchoress at the Dominican friary and to the two local Carthusian houses, suggest an empathy with a life devoted to religious purposes and prayer. This is particularly noteworthy as she came from a community where, generally, boys and girls from the wealthier classes did not appear to aspire or were not encouraged to follow such a path. We do not have details of Maud's youthful pious inclinations and devotional activities and it is possible that the path her piety took reflected, to some degree, the different stages of the female life cycle, and the possibility that she felt increasingly drawn towards a more devout and contemplative life-style as she grew older, having fulfilled the worldly roles of wife and mother. Even so, from what we know of her later piety, it is not unlikely that the religious life had seemed congenial to her as a young girl, but that, being bound or constrained by the beliefs and ethos of her class and community, she was dissuaded from following such impulses, which were only allowed to resurface when she was no longer tied by the obligations of married life. A generation later, Alice Baker, her step-daughter, was possibly faced with the same

constraints and expectations, but was either more able or more determined to follow a life devoted to religion. The evidence is suggestive of Alice's strong sense of religious vocation, a vocation which may have persisted throughout her marriage, and it has been suggested that her resolution to take the veil may not only have been encouraged by Maud, but may have influenced the older woman's decision to become a vowess. To an extent, it may well be true to say that her support for Alice's chosen way of life reflected the nature of her own piety, and a religious vocation she could only partially realize. The possibility that she felt herself bound by the expectations of the urban élite class that she had been born into whilst simultaneously being drawn to the religious life may go some way towards explaining the different paths marked out for or followed by her daughters. Apart from Alice, she does not seem to have encouraged any of her other children to follow such a path and her will, written only a short while before her death, shows her attempting carefully to consolidate the marital alliance made for her youngest surviving daughter, Anne. As mentioned previously, the fact that Alice was not a blood relative, along with the fact that she had already been married, may have played a part in this; yet it may also reflect the conflict and difficulties faced by a devout woman drawn towards the religious life, but whose decisions and life choices, and the plans made for her children's future, were inevitably shaped and circumscribed by the mentalité of the urban community which she had been born into. It is possible that her daughter Joan, like her mother, became a vowess later in life, indicating that she may have been influenced by her mother's piety, but this decision made by the younger woman was not something Maud would have been aware of, for Joan was still married to Thomas Pace at the time of Maud's death.

It should also be pointed out, however, that if she stood out amongst her urban contemporaries as a particularly devout woman and, as regards her pious inclinations and associations, appears to have had more in common with

women from noble and gentry communities, the fact that she was also part of a close network of pious Bristol laywomen suggests that elements of her own piety, the draw towards the religious life, to the contemplative and the ascetic, were, in fact, more a part of female piety in late-fifteenth-century Bristol, than at first glance appears to be the case, and can, therefore, help to contextualize the religious experiences of women living within this urban community.

NOTES

1. Burgess, *Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints'*, pp. 19, 22; see Chapter 2, pp. 73-6 above for the benefactions.
2. Great Orphan Book, f. 167ʳ.
3. BRO, Church Book of St. John the Baptist, f. 9ʳ.
4. PRO, PCC 17 Logge (PROB 11/17), f. 126ᵛ.
5. Burgess, *Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints'*, p. 23.
6. PRO, PCC 17 Logge (PROB 11/7), ff. 125ᵛ-126ʳ.
7. Great Orphan Book, f. 246ʳ.
8. BRO, Register of Recognizances for Orphans, 1333-1601, 04422, f. 100ᵛ.
9. See Carole Rawcliffe, 'Margaret Stodeye, Lady Philipot (d. 1431)', in Barron and Sutton, *Medieval London Widows*, pp. 85-98.
10. The lists of Bristol's mayors and sheriffs contain the names of numerous members of the Spicer family.
11. Other examples from amongst the wealthy citizens of Bristol in this period include Robert Halle *alias* Hegham (d. 1441), Richard Jacob *alias* Jakes, merchant (d. 1475), and among the benefactors of All Saints' church, John Jenkyns *alias* Steyner. The Dees, friends or associates of the Bakers, were also known as Davys.
12. See Carus-Wilson, *Overseas Trade Accounts of Bristol*, pp. 205, 218-9.
13. Great Orphan Book, f. 245ᵛ.
14. Burgess, *Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints'*, pp. 136-7.
15. Great Orphan Book, f. 246ʳ.
16. PRO, PCC 4 Holgrave (PROB 11/14), f. 27ᵛ.
17. Margaret's birthdate is given as 1479 in the Register of Recognizances, f. 101ᵛ. Although Alice's birth is not actually recorded, a memorandum at the end of Thomas Baker's 1492 will in the Great Orphan Book, f. 246ᵛ, refers to Alice's marriage and states that the goods left to her by him, which she was to have at the age of sixteen, were received by her husband, Thomas Woddington. This would suggest that she had reached that age and would put her birthday somewhere around 1476/7, two years or so before Margaret's. Furthermore, in his will, Thomas lists his children in birth order, with Alice's name heading the list.
18. The birthdates of the five younger Baker children are to be found in the Register of Recognizances, ff. 99ᵛ-102ʳ, although not in birth order. An entry for Thomas occurs first, followed by Matilda, Joan, Anne and Elizabeth.
19. Margaret's death is recorded in the Register of Recognizances, f. 102ᵛ.
20. The very short will of the younger Thomas Baker is registered PRO, PCC 29 Bennett (PROB 11/16), f. 227ʳ.
21. PRO, PCC 4 Holgrave (PROB 11/14), f. 282ᵛ. In her will, Maud stated

that Thomas Bale came from Monmouth, and considering that her husband Thomas left money to the parish church of nearby St. Briavels, it is possible that regional connections lay behind the association.

22. *Ibid.*, f. 28^{v}. Thomas Pace served as sheriff in 1516/17 and as mayor in 1531/32.

23. Burgess, *Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints'*, p. 21.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 22. There is no record of Maud's vow in the registers of the bishops of Worcester, but it may be noted that the register of Robert Morton, Bishop of Worcester (1487-1497), has been lost for the years 1493-1497, the period when Maud was most likely to have taken her vow.

25. See, for example, the wills in the Great Orphan Book of Walter Derby (d. 1385), f. 15^{r}, Robert Saunders (d. 1391), f. 35^{v}, John Sely (d. 1413), ff. 122^{r-v}, John Droys (d. 1417), ff. 130^{v}-131^{r}, James Cokkes (d. 1423), ff. 149^{r}-152^{v}, Thomas Elyot (d. 1505), ff. 254^{r}-255^{r}.

26. Mary C. Erler, 'Three Fifteenth-Century Vowesses', in Barron and Sutton, *Medieval London Widows*, pp. 182-3, lists twenty-three women from various sources known to have become vowed women. Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries*, states that between 1370-1470, widows 'in the diocese of York were regularly professed as vowesses', and that many of them were attached to Clementhorpe nunnery at York, although it should be pointed out that a number of these were gentry women and not of urban origin. It is possible that a number of the women living together in Norwich as 'sorores dedicate castite' and discussed by Norman Tanner, may also have been vowesses.

27. BRO, Fox Collection 08153 (i) and (iv), no. 69.

28. Great Orphan Book, f. 246^{r}.

29. PRO, PCC 4 Holgrave (PROB 11/14), f. 27^{v}.

30. Tanner, *Church in Late Medieval Norwich*, p. 130.

31. Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries*, p. 64.

32. Rev. F. W. Weaver (ed.), *Somerset Medieval Wills 1501-1530*, SRS 19 (1903), p. 161.

33. Leighton, 'Blackfriars', makes no mention of the existence of an anchoress; nor is a possible site given for the site of a recluse's cell on the plans of the friary drawn from the archaelogical excavations carried out there. No anchoress is mentioned as residing there by William Worcester in his topography of 1480, although he wrote about both the hermits who inhabited the chapels of St. Brendan and St. Vincent.

34. Meech and Allen, *Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 43.

35. I have only found one other Bristol testamentary bequest to a female recluse in the late medieval period: Nicholas Chepstowe in his will of 1383, Great Orphan Book, f. 6^{r}, left 2s to an 'ancorisse de Stapulton'. It is also known that an anchoress once resided in the hermitage sited on Brandon Hill, as a 1351 entry in the episcopal registers of Worcester, which is transcribed in Barrett, *History and Antiquities*, p. 61, records the enclosure of a Lucy of Newchurch, Herefordshire within it.

36. PRO, PCC 4 Holgrave (PROB 11/14), ff. 28^{r}-29^{v}. A Thomas Wodyngton 'decretorum doctorem' was admitted to the living of St. Peter's, Bristol in 1488; see HWRO, Register of Robert Morton, Bishop of Worcester (1487-1493), f. 21^{v}. He may not have been the 'Master Doctor Wodington' mentioned in Maud's will, as she had another brother called Thomas, but it is possible that he was a close relative. Emden, *Biographical Register*, *II*, 2083, states that he originated from St. John's parish, Bristol.

37. PRO, PCC 4 Holgrave (PROB 11/14), ff. 28^{r-v}. I have been unable to interpret this word. It is perhaps a scribal variant deriving from the Latin 'addubbo' meaning 'to stud (with gems)' or related to the word 'aduncino/adunco' meaning 'to catch with a hook': see R. E. Latham, *Revised Medieval Latin Word List* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 7, 9.

38. PRO, PCC 4 Holgrave (PROB 11/14), ff. 28^{r}, 29^{r}. Presumably Joan had already had property settled on her when she married.

39. WRO, Register of Edmund Audley, D1/2/14, f. 126v.
40. PRO, PCC 4 Holgrave (PROB 11/14), f. 28r.
41. Gilchrist and Oliva, *Religious Women in Medieval East Anglia*, p. 52; Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, pp. 19-24.
42. Great Orphan Book, f. 246v.
43. Register of Recognizances, f. 102v. A sixth of Margaret's share was given, perhaps because there were six surviving children, and Maud intended that the others would each receive a sixth of Margaret's goods when they came of age.
44. In this case, the relationship between the couple espoused was close, and may have lain within the prohibited degree against such marriages, which extended not only to those related by blood, but also spiritual relationships and those related by marriage: see Pollock and Maitland, *History of English Law*, II, 387. However, a similar situation is to be found regarding the children of a wealthy London widow, Lady Joan Bradbury, whereby John Bradbury, her second husband, hoped to marry the son of his wife's daughter from a previous marriage (his step-grandson) to his niece: see Anne F. Sutton, 'Lady Joan Bradbury (d. 1530)', in Barron and Sutton, *Medieval London Widows*, pp. 208-38 (pp. 219-20). I have been unable to find a dispensation for the Woddington marriage in the printed papal registers.
45. PRO, PCC 4 Holgrave (PROB 11/14), f. 29r. In her will, Maud describes John Shepard as being 'late of Bristow'. Although no family of that name appears amongst the lists of mayors and sheriffs, or in other civic or parish records, the name does occur a number of times in the overseas trade records. It strikes me that it may also be a derivation of Shipward, the name of a wealthy mercantile Bristol family in the fifteenth century.
46. Brewer and Gairdner, *Letters, Foreign and Domestic*, XIV, (i), p. 230; also quoted in John Hutchins, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset*, 3rd edn, 4 vols (Westminster: Bowyer Nichols, 1868), III, 31.
47. Alice's decision to revert solely to her former name may have been unusual, although it was not unknown for an urban woman to choose to be known by a name other than that of her last husband. Margaret Stodeye, Lady Philipot, a wealthy London widow, for example, chose to be known by the name of her second husband in her fourth and final widowhood: see Rawcliffe, 'Margaret Stodeye', p. 97. Some wealthy Bristol women who married more than once are known to have continued using their surname from a previous marriage along with the one that they had acquired from their most recent marriage, one such being Joan, whose last husband was Clement Wiltshire (d. 1488), Mayor of Bristol. She was apparently more commonly known as Bateyn (probably the name of a former husband) even throughout her final marriage. I have encountered only one other example, apart from Alice, where a Bristol woman may have reverted solely to her birthname on widowhood. Felicia Holeway in her 1417 will registered in the Great Orphan Book, ff. 136r-v, mentions her late husband, Edmund Forster, several times and does not indicate that she had had any other husband. It therefore seems a possibility that Holeway was the surname she had been born with.
48. On the urban lay community, nunneries and the female religious vocation see Chapter 3, pp. 113-24.
49. For a summary of the nunnery's land and property holdings see *VCH Dorset*, II, 75-6.
50. For details of the lives of those women who served as abbesses of the nunnery see Laura Sydenham, *Shaftesbury and its Abbey* (Lingfield: Oakwood Press, 1959).
51. PRO, PCC 4 Holgrave (PROB 11/14), f. 27v.
52. I have found only one instance where there may have been a link between a wealthy Bristol merchant family and a Dorset gentry family. Joan (d. 1489), daughter of the Thomas and Margaret Rowley buried in St. John's church, Bristol, married Roger Twynyhoo of Cayford near Frome, who was evidently

related to the Dorset Twynyhos, for he mentioned a number of them in his 1497 will, including Abbess Margery Twynyho who was named as one of the witnesses along with her brother Christopher: see Weaver, *Somerset Medieval Wills 1383-1500*, p. 352, and for information on Joan Twynyho née Rowley see Chapter I, pp. 19-20 above.
53. Erler, 'Three Fifteenth-Century Vowesses', p. 177.
54. Hutchins, *History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset*, III, 31.
55. Marilyn Oliva, 'Aristocracy or Meritocracy? Office-holding Patterns in Late Medieval English Nunneries', in Sheils and Wood, *Women in the Church*, pp. 197-208.
56. PRO, PCC 33 Bodfelde (PROB 11/21), f. 256^r^.
57. Sydenham, *Shaftesbury and its Abbey*, p. 67.
58. WRO, MSS Pembroke Survey 2057/73. The description of the abbey mentioning the two nuns is also printed in F. C. Hopton, 'The Buildings of Shaftesbury Abbey in the Mid-Sixteenth Century', *DNHASP*, 115 (1993), p. 13.
59. A William Dee *alias* Davy, burgess, left a will dated 1508, which is registered PRO, PCC 6 Bennett (PROB 11/16), f. 42^r^. In it, he asked for John Baker, perhaps the same man who was left a bequest in Maud's will, to act as one of his executors.
60. It should be pointed out, however, that from a study of testamentary evidence at least, there can be no strict definition of what constituted a servant and that it did not necessarily mean someone of vastly lower status than the testator. It is clear that some of those referred to as 'servants' were as much friends or companions, while others were quite closely related to their employers.
61. PRO, PCC 4 Holgrave (PROB 11/14), f. 27^v^.
62. See Chapter 5, pp. 192-7 above.
63. PRO, PCC 4 Holgrave (PROB 11/14), f. 28^v^. Richard Bromfeld was also the last master of St. John's Hospital at Redcliffe Gate, handing it over to Thomas Powell, clerk, and John Smyth, merchant of Bristol in 1544: see Skeeters, *Community and Clergy*, p. 158. John Dyer was admitted as a chantry priest to the second chantry of the Kalendars' guild in August 1500: see HWRO, Register of Silvestro de Gigli, f. 16^v^.
64. PRO, PCC 29 Bennett (PROB 11/16), f. 227^v^. He may have been a relative, perhaps the son of her sister, Joan Johns. On relationships between women and private chaplains see Chapter 4, pp. 158-60 above.
65. PRO, PCC 4 Holgrave (PROB 11/14), f. 27^v^. The Prior of Hinton at the time was Richard Peers who held office from 1500-1530: see Thompson, *History of the Somerset Carthusians*, p. 116.
66. Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, pp. 147, 180-1. Cecily of York, whose granddaughter Elizabeth was married to Margaret's son, Henry VII, is another example of a pious dowager who patronized the order, as evidenced by a gift recorded posthumously of £13 6s 8d to the London charterhouse and by her possession of a number of texts associated with or favoured by the Carthusians: see Armstrong, 'The Piety of Cecily, Duchess of York', p. 83.
67. Thompson, *Carthusian Order in England*, p. 321.
68. See Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, pp. 182-3.
69. See Chapter 2, pp. 77-80 above.

CONCLUSION

Whilst it cannot be claimed that the patriarchal authorities who governed late-medieval communities directly influenced or moulded the religious activity and pious expression of the female inhabitants living within them, it is evident that through social, economic and political factors over which the former had some control, and which influenced their attitudes towards and their perceptions of women and their role in society, the religious aspects of women's lives could be affected. I have argued that by the fifteenth century, the élite of Bristol society had developed a somewhat insular mentalité (more so, perhaps, than those of other large urban centres and the smaller urban communities of Gloucestershire and Somerset), perhaps because its members had comparatively little social contact or interaction with local gentry society. This probably came about because of the city's dependence on trade and its growth as a purely mercantile community rather than as a religious or administrative centre. It appears that the wealthy who, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, came into the city from the outlying regions, tended to remain within the confines of the urban community and society of which they had become a part, marrying into wealthy urban families. In the fifteenth century, relatively few members of the Bristol urban élite appear to have made gentry matches (although this situation may have begun to change by the end of the century and the beginning of the sixteenth), and this limited the amount of contact with local noble and gentry society. Furthermore, although it is evident that some gentry families owned property within the city, it cannot be said that there was a strong gentry or noble presence there by the 1300s, particularly after the decline in influence of the Berkeley family, whose relationship with the burgesses of the city had been anyway, for the most part, antagonistic and fraught with difficulties from the thirteenth century.

This tendency to insularity, had, I believe, some effect on the pious

outlook and religious inclinations of the city's wealthy inhabitants, and on both their relationship with those religious houses lying outside the city and their attitudes towards the religious vocation. This applies to both male and female monastic houses, but as there was a higher percentage of bequests to the latter than the former, it is easier to detect a pattern. Bequests to nunneries certainly declined from the early fifteenth century onwards, the decline to houses outside the city, most notably Barrow Gurney, being the sharpest. It may have been the case that as fourteenth-century emigrés from outside the city moved into the mercantile community and married within it, their ties with those monastic houses near their place of origin lapsed or grew weaker. The situation may also have been exacerbated by a lack of contact with local gentry families, some of whom maintained connections with or had relatives at these houses. Such a decline in bequests may also indicate a certain apathy towards the religious vocation on the part of the city's élite as regards the women of its own families. Possibly, for a community whose roots and growth were so engrained in trade, the religious vocation may have been seen as increasingly incompatible with the mercantile ethos. It will be recalled that this has been put forward as an explanation for the decline in the number of testamentary bequests left to the friars, who remained the most popular of the religious orders in Bristol,[1] enjoying more support than the monastic orders (although my own research has shown that there is less evidence of a decline to the mendicant orders on the part of women, suggesting that such an ethos had less effect on their pious outlook or mentalité).

Whatever the case, it is clear that few women from Bristol élite families entered female monastic houses, certainly fewer, it seems, than did so in other large urban communities such as York and Norwich. Whether in general urban women were less likely to enter nunneries than their noble and gentry counterparts is a moot point, although it has been argued that in East Anglia

women of urban origin made up the second highest group of nunnery entrants.[2] As regards Bristol, it is possible that the lack of social interaction that its élite women had with pious noble and gentry women, some of whom may have had links with or resided at nearby female monastic houses, may have played a part in the low number of female entrants to the religious life from among the Bristol laity, although it will be recalled that the number of Somerset testators mentioning daughters who were nuns was never that high throughout the period. Thus the possibility that the low number of Bristol laywomen entering nunneries was part of a regional phenomenon cannot be discounted.

There is evidence to suggest that some élite Bristol women may have been favourably disposed towards a religious vocation in youth, but were not able or not encouraged to follow such a path. Maud Baker, who became a vowess after two marriages, and who enjoyed a close relationship with her step-daughter Alice, perhaps influencing the younger woman's decision to become a nun at Shaftesbury, may have been one such woman. The evidence is even more suggestive in the case of Alice herself, who was married at sixteen to one of Maud's relatives, but who chose to pursue the religious life sometime in her mid-twenties after her husband's death rather than to remarry. Another like-minded woman may have been Alice Chester, a contemporary and likely associate of Maud's, whose close relationship with her son (or step-son), John Chester, head of Barlynch Priory in Somerset, is clear from her will. It strikes me that the growth in devotion to the cult of St. Anne within the city may also have been connected with this issue. There is some evidence to suggest that, in the later fifteenth century, St. Anne (a saint who, it has been argued, enjoyed a certain vogue with urban élites throughout Europe, although not all historians agree on this) became increasingly popular with some Bristol élite women, including Alice Chester, veneration of her cult perhaps reflecting a need or desire to reconcile the attraction they may have felt towards the

religious life with the worldly vocation demanded of them.

The changing economic situation may also have had a considerable impact upon the lives and position of women living in a close-knit and possibly inward-looking fifteenth-century urban community. It has been argued that changes in economic circumstances, resulting initially from the effects of the Black Death in the mid-fourteenth century, may have affected women's material circumstances, giving them a greater freedom and prosperity. It may also have consequently affected the way in which they and their role were perceived by a patriarchal society. Not all historians agree that there was a "Golden Age" for women which was followed by an economic decline whereby attitudes towards them may have hardened (perhaps as a result of freedoms they were perceived as having gained), and it may have been the case that such freedoms were only experienced by some women in some places. However, it does seem that economic change or decline in the fifteenth century (although more evident in some towns and cities than others), caused authorities in a number of towns to show increasingly harsh attitudes towards some groups of women, attempting to circumscribe their activities: in Bristol, for instance, a 1461 weaving ordinance attempted to regulate and limit the employment of women. I have detected changes in some aspects of lay piety, most notably charitable giving, which may have been related to or reflected, in part, these changing economic circumstances and perceptions of women. It was not so much that charitable giving to poor women changed completely in nature on the part of male and female testators, but that features already apparent in the nature of such activity became possibly more accentuated or pronounced. Thus, women's wills tend to show a decline in bequests made to particular groups of women, including those in almshouses and hospitals, and an increase in the number of individual women known to them (some possibly of humbler status), bequests of this nature already being a defining feature of many women's wills. By contrast, after about 1430, the charitable bequests of men

to poor women almost invariably took the form of dowries to poor virgins, already the most popular form of female poor relief to be found in male wills. This trend may reflect the lack of available life choices open to women by this period, but also a change in male attitudes towards the position of unmarried women. It is of interest to note that such changes in charitable giving to poor women show some correlation with the decline in bequests to other groups of women such as nuns and hospital sisters, and I have tentatively suggested that these two things might be related, perhaps reflecting an increasing suspicion or fear of female status independent of marriage. However, more research needs to be done on such issues in other urban centres before conclusions can be more positively drawn.

Apart from social and economic factors affecting the make-up and mentalité of Bristol society and their consequent effects on the lives and position of women within it, political factors and their relationship to religious life within the urban community should not be overlooked. The élites of large urban communities were, of course, always aware of the need to keep control and order over diverse and disparate groups of people living in close proximity, and to encourage unity and harmony among them. Thus such corporate religious aspects of urban life as the celebration of saints' cults and feast days like Corpus Christi, in which all sections of the community participated, were of immense importance. In the promotion and veneration of some saints' cults, the male governing élite appear to have played a large part, thereby allying the religious and devotional aspects of urban life with the political. To a certain degree, this can be seen in the veneration of St. George in Bristol (a saint also popular with urban élites elsewhere in England), but more significantly, St. Katherine, whose cult, to an extent, can be said to have been 'appropriated' by the male mercantile élite who held power in the urban community. This, I believe, may have consequently affected the nature of female devotion to her cult within Bristol, as there is clear evidence of a

disparity between the percentage of male and female bequests left to Katherine altars, chapels and guilds. This is of particular note, as, for the most part, the percentage of bequests left by Bristol laymen and women to male and female saints' altars reveals little discrepancy. Furthermore, as far as I am aware, neither countrywide, nor in any of the countries where the cult of St. Katherine was venerated, does she appear to have been more popular with men than with women. Indeed, it is evident that for some women she could actually serve as a figure of empowerment. It can therefore be argued that such an 'appropriation' by the governing authorities in Bristol affected the attitudes of their élite female contemporaries, who may have become, consciously or unconsciously, alienated from veneration of her cult, as they shared no part in the government of the urban community, and were unable to inhabit or enter the same social and political spaces as men.

There were thus a number of factors which may have played some part in influencing or controlling women's choices and activities within the late medieval urban community regarding religious and other aspects of their lives. But that these factors denied women any control or means of shaping their own pious expression is not entirely the case. Of course, for a woman, freedom over her own life and activity, including pious and devotional freedom, depended, in part, on marital status, widowhood being, at least as far as the élite or wealthier classes were concerned, the period when women enjoyed the most freedom of manoeuvre and expression. We have only a little information — from benefaction lists, churchwardens' accounts and a few other sources—of women acting jointly with their husbands as pious benefactors (as in the case of Thomas and Joan Halleway of All Saints' parish), or possibly influencing larger religious projects undertaken by their spouses, as Isabel Barstaple may have done regarding her husband's foundation of Trinity Hospital. However, I have felt the issue to be worth looking at briefly, because of the large amount of wills made by single and married women

between 1380-1420, a number which comprises about half of all female Bristol testators in that period, and which perhaps reflects an increased freedom gained by women, a freedom which they apparently lost as the fifteenth century progressed. Such a phenomenon in female will-making at this time appears to have been unique to urban communities, although in some of them, such as York, the trend seems to have occurred slightly later or lasted longer than in Bristol. Although usually brief, such wills do provide some insight into female life choices and activities, including the religious ones. Indeed, in the case of single women, this is practically the only evidence we possess as to pious inclination. It is important to take into account the reason why such wills were written: in the case of married women, most of whom appear to have been fairly young when they died, it may have been prompted by preoccupations about property, the bulk of their wills being concerned primarily with such issues, which may account for their lack of detail as to pious provision compared with that to be found in the wills of widows. However, as regards the single women studied, such a lack of detail is, perhaps, surprising, as it seems that they possessed the freedom and the material means to make such provision. It may point to the possibility that marriage and motherhood were the most formative influences on the piety of women who did not follow a religious vocation, although it may also have been the case that age and the stage reached by women in the life cycle was as important as marital status; for the wills of older married women such as Maud Esterfeld are more detailed in this respect. Yet it is also possible that it was not until widowhood that women felt properly able to give freer reign to their pious needs and expression. In the case of both Maud and Alice Baker, there are hints that a desire for the religious life was channelled elsewhere when young, and that it was not until widowhood, albeit a stage one reached at a younger age than the other, that they were both able to satisfy these inclinations in some measure.

One feature of the wills of widowed women which is much less evident in those of married and single women is the large number of women named by testatrices as legatees, a feature which, in a number of cases, shows evidence of extensive female networks. Various types of literary evidence suggest that friendships and close relationships between women were often viewed in a negative light, but it is clear from testamentary and other evidence that female friendships and networks were of considerable importance to women, and that the study of them can yield information on patterns of pious transmission or shared religious experiences. Furthermore, it can also be argued that networks of pious women and friendships between devout women could be conducive to the creation of space, important in a society where women's movements and freedom to manoeuvre were so restricted. In support of this, I would point particularly to the network of pious mercantile widows of All Saints' and other central parishes who made extensive donations to All Saints' church of furnishings, ornaments, tabernacles and priestly vestments, and who commissioned altar fronts, screens and wall-paintings within it. The embellishment of parish churches was a feature of lay piety countrywide, and it has been argued that this led to the creation of space within them by those who donated.[3] For women, it can be argued that it was one of the few means of gaining some freedom of expression, providing an opportunity for them to create their own space. In particular, where an extensive parish network of such widows existed, they may have further encouraged each other in this activity and hence in the creation of such space. Some similarities in pious taste and expression can certainly be detected in the benefactions of Maud Baker and Alice Chester, hinting perhaps at a shared pious experience between the two women. The formation and existence of pious parish networks of women, and the creation of a space they could influence within the parish church, was possibly a feature or manifestation of female piety more likely to be found within large urban communities (where greater numbers of women

lived in close proximity to the parish church and to each other) than elsewhere. Noble and gentry women did not always live in such close quarters to their parish church—or to each other, for that matter. However, more research needs to be done on the nature of the relationship of urban women with their parish church in other large communities before we can conclude that it was a defining feature of the piety of élite urban laywomen. It can also be argued that the issue of space and the restrictions on their movement governed other aspects of the devotional lives of urban women: in particular, their relationships with secular male religious, not only private chaplains within the household, but also parish priests, some of whom, it will be recalled, encouraged wealthy widowed benefactresses in their generosity, in some cases, much to the chagrin of these women's families.[4]

The formation of pious female networks and the creation of space was not, however, necessarily exclusive to mercantile women. It is evident that a network or tradition of gentry widows, including the Cornwells of Shropshire, the Guildfords of Kent and the Poyntzes of south Gloucestershire, were attached to, or, with their female attendants, lived in Bristol within St Mark's Hospital as corrodians for a period of about sixty years between 1480-1540. Some of these women remembered the hospital and its brethren quite generously in their wills. Thus again, it is perhaps possible to talk about the existence, creation, or even intrusion of a female space into a traditionally male social and religious space. Indeed, a letter written by Jane Guildford indicates that this is how it was perceived in some quarters. (This fear of the intrusion of female space into areas that were seen as being traditionally male domains can also be seen in the affair of the hospital sisters attached to St. Bartholomew's, who, in the early fifteenth century, lost to the brethren of the institution the power and control that they had gained there in the fourteenth.) It may be noted, however, that the two networks of women discussed above—those of All Saints' and other central parishes, and their contemporaries at St.

Mark's—were based on different spatial locations within the city, perhaps pointing to a gentry/mercantile divide peculiar to Bristol which was partly reflected in the city's religious topography: gentry patronage and presence being based on St. Augustine's Abbey and St. Mark's on the western side of the town, and that of the mercantile élite on the central city parishes and the friaries sited further to the east. This topographical divide and lack of interaction between mercantile and gentry groupings was perhaps unique to Bristol, for in other cities there appears to have been greater contact between the two.

It can be argued that some of the above-discussed issues relating to women's piety apply to all élite women who lived in medieval urban communites, although more research needs to be done on the lives of women living in large cities other than Bristol, and individual studies compared, to give an overall picture. Even so, it does seem that there were particular features relating to the city's growth primarily as a centre of trade, namely an inward-looking mentalité on the part of its wealthier citizens in the fifteenth century, which affected all aspects of the lives of its inhabitants, including the life choices and pious expression of women from the mercantile élite.

NOTES

1. Skeeters, *Community and Clergy*, pp. 17-19, and 'Clergy of Bristol', pp. 106-7.
2. Oliva, *Convent and the Community*, p. 57.
3. Graves, 'Social Space in the English Parish Church', p. 315.
4. For the case of Agnes Fyler see Chapter 5, pp. 33-5 above.

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